

# Theory of Art Cinemas

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*to Ruth, forever Darlin'*

## Table of Contents

Acknowledgements	
Preface	
Section One: Art, Auteurism, and the World	
Chapter One	<i>Introduction: Correcting Art Cinema's Partial Vision</i>
Chapter Two	<i>Art as Genre as Canon: Defining "Art Cinema"</i>
Chapter Three	<i>No Start, No End: Auteurism and the Auteur Theory</i>
Chapter Four	<i>From "Foreign Films" to "World Cinema"</i>
Section Two: Formats and Fetishes	
Chapter Five	<i>Recovery and Legitimation in the Traditional Art Film</i>
Chapter Six	<i>Losing the Asterisk: A Theory of Cult Art Cinema</i>
Chapter Seven	<i>Revisiting "The Two Avant-Gardes"</i>
Chapter Eight	<i>"Sucking" the Mainstream: A Theory of Mainstream Art Cinema</i>
Section Three: Institutions and Distributions	
Chapter Nine	<i>Re-Integrating Stardom (. . . and Technology and Reception and . . .)</i>
Chapter Ten	<i>Art Cinema as Institution, Redux: Art Houses, Film Festivals, and Film Studies</i>
Chapter Eleven	<i>Anti-Commercial Rhetoric in Art Cinema</i>
Chapter Twelve	<i>Conclusion: Art Cinema, the Distribution Theory</i>
Epilogue	<i>Beyond, Before Cinephilia</i>
Notes	
Filmography	

Bibliography

Index

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past.  
the long  
direct human action

There is comfort, however, in the fact that hybrid forms are quite unstable. They tend to change from their own unreality into purer forms, even though this may mean a return to the Beyond our blundering there are inherent forces that, in run, overcome error and incompleteness and toward the purity of goodness and truth.

—Rudolf Arnheim, “A New Laocoön” (1938)

Object to the Hollywood film and you’re an intellectual snob, object to the avant-garde films and you’re a philistine. But, while in Hollywood, one must often be a snob; in avant-garde circles, one must often be a Philistine.

—Pauline Kael, “Movies, the Desperate Art” (1956)

“What do you mean by ‘good film’?”

—*La Maman et la Putain* (dir. Jean Eustache, 1973)

that  
to gain

Of course, not all stories have happy endings. Why would we pay seven dollars and fifty cents for a simulation of life makes us miserable? Sometimes, as with art films, it is status through cultural machismo.

—Steven Pinker, *How the Mind Works* (1997)

Federico Fellini  
1970s to throw the names  
in the company of  
Hawthorne?

Is it any more outrageous in the early twenty-first century to throw the names of the Mitchell Brothers and Radley Metzger/Henry Paris around in the company of and Ingmar Bergman than it was in the of John Ford and Howard Hawks around Herman Melville and Nathaniel

—Peter Lehman, *Pornography: Film and Culture* (2006)

I don’t claim to look like George Clooney, but I’m not a beast either. I also love foreign and art films, and tend to be critical of

modern pop culture.

—Teacherdude, “Men Seeking Women,” *Chicago Reader* (2010)

## Preface

This theory goes back to at least 2003, when I was working on *Soft in the Middle* (2006), my study of American softcore cinema. During that research, I was struck by the connections between *Dr. Jekyll and Mistress Hyde* (2003), an ultra-low-budget softcore movie by Tony Marsiglia, and *Mulholland Drive* (2001), a mid-budget experimental art film by David Lynch. Not only did Marsiglia allude to Lynch and his oneiric devices, he deployed Lynch’s signature auteur rhetoric in refusing to explain his art, in waxing coy and ambiguous to avoid dispersing what was most ineffable, most fully mysterious about it. Further, Marsiglia’s studio, Seduction Cinema, stressed his Lynchian insistence on control in shooting films like *Mistress Hyde*, *Lust for Dracula* (2004), *Sinful* (2006), and *Chantal* (2007), promoting this arty obsessiveness as a sign of cultural distinction in an otherwise flagging industry. It is not surprising, then, that Marsiglia’s status as a softcore auteur was taken for granted in American cult subcultures.

Naturally, in writing about Marsiglia, I alluded to Lynch, just as I had alluded to Ingmar Bergman, another “serious” auteur with oneiric tendencies, when writing about Lynch. This was all natural and proper, for the formal and historical connections were there, they were real—and given my background as both a Lynch scholar and a softcore scholar, they were obvious, so it would have been capricious had I failed to mention them simply because Marsiglia’s *oeuvre* was produced, consumed, and acclaimed in a uniquely déclassé sector of moviedom. Still, it did not feel at *all* natural or proper to mix Lynch and Bergman into discussions of a softcore director. It felt criminal—or, perhaps worse,

just ridiculous. Those intractably mixed feelings, together with the anxiety that attended them, prompted me to construct this theory of art cinemas.

There are reasons that it feels so odd to move across these contentious high-low boundaries.<sup>1</sup> These reasons include constraints grounded in individual, institutional, cultural, historical, and even biological concerns. But none of these constraints places an automatic check on scholars, who should try to look through them to see how mystified art cinema is in every sector, including some that may seem utterly beyond mystification. Marsiglia's debased art cinema, along with the low-cost industry that has shaped it, offers a prime example. Theorists have provided few models that make sense of this director's high-art status within cult subcultures. So I started over.

I did this, at bottom, because I believe that it is the film theorist's job to analyze and interrelate all cinematic phenomena, not just preferred cinematic phenomena. When I saw untraditional examples of art cinema in places that I did not expect, I felt compelled to figure out how such examples could function as art cinema. On the other hand, I do not believe that film theorists should overcompensate in the direction of the untraditional. An expanded theory of art cinema cannot be *more* accurate if it ignores the most traditional formats, rhetorics, and canons. In my view, then, a new theory should weave art cinema's consecrated elements together with its unconsecrated components as discovered in the conjoined worlds of experimental cinema, cult cinema, mainstream cinema, and various emerging world art cinemas. My intention is to look across this diversity so as to analyze how such inclusiveness affects our understanding of an ostensibly exclusive category. If I succeed in this, future theorists may feel a little less strange, a little less illicit perhaps, in moving among art cinemas of varying degrees of legitimacy.

But if I hope to affect film theory, I make no pretense of threatening the resilient hierarchies of cultural value that have sustained art cinema. Individuals in the thrall of what Pierre Bourdieu calls the “illusio” of the aesthetic will no doubt continue to think it wrong or just in bad taste to cite *Persona* (1966) or *Mulholland Drive* in the same breath as *Mistress Hyde*—for if they didn’t, art cinema might collapse. Fortunately, that is not the sort of impact that academic theories tend to have.

Three disclaimers. First, I should say something about my idea of “film theory.” I see film history, film analysis, and film theory as having different ways and means. Film history subordinates theorization to archival detail, while film theory does the opposite; film analysis, by contrast, focuses on problems of convention, style, meaning, criticism. I know that this idea of film theory opens me to critiques, not only because it departs from historicism, the most crucial movement in film studies today, but also because it does not share the aims and politics of grand theory. But what this idea of film theory should not suggest is that I feel “above it all.” Rather, I just consider it my duty as a theorist to be *reductive*—but in a *good* sense, wherein I pursue generalities that organize in a logical, accurate way as many details as possible from the historical, cultural, political, biological, and textual spheres. Another way of saying this is that I see film theory as the unraveling of all the assumptions that have resulted from my interactions with the movies and their contexts. Today, film history, film analysis, and other, more interdisciplinary modes have supplied art-cinema studies with enough solid information that those of us who desire a more synthetic theory of art cinema may begin writing one. This will serve us all, I think, because whether or not our theoretical assumptions are explicit, they are always operative in our scholarship. It helps to isolate them, to examine them.

I also want to qualify my use of terms that may sound elitist to some. I understand the difficulties of words like “legitimate” and “illegitimate,” for I remember my negative reaction when I first read *Distinction* (1979), Bourdieu’s classic sociology of art, taste, and status. By casually applying terms like “legitimate” to high culture and “illegitimate” to low, Bourdieu risked reinforcing the belief that certain artifacts *deserved* their relative positions based on their intrinsic “fineness.” Of course, Bourdieu wanted to demystify our ideas of distinction; he was using these terms not to make an essentialist graph of “real” intrinsic values but to make an anti-essentialist chart of social positions often based on received ideas of legitimacy. The problem was that there was no good way to avoid using such terms. They were convenient for plotting contingent forms of status, and any equally effective tools carried similar dangers. The same is true in this book. So let me say it plainly: things, ideas, and people don’t deserve their status in an absolute way. This holds true even if *some* of the art preferences upheld by our received ideas of legitimacy have a natural or hard-wired basis, as I assume they do.

And finally: art cinema belongs to the world, but I am an American. I understand that the United States is not the “core” of cinema, much less of art cinema, no matter how this book sounds at times. Indeed, this book aims to dissect that easy sense of center that is one of art cinema’s principal seductions. I apologize, then, if my study, which aspires to a modest universality, betrays native biases. Such biases do not match my ideals, but I suspect that they come with *all* our territories: for we are each somewhere, and we are, over long periods of our lives, only there. The best that we can hope for, it seems, is to approach universality. But we cannot hope to achieve even that much if we do not first

admit our constraints, integrating a sense of restriction, some sense of lived conditions, into our theories. I have done my best to do that here.

*Chicago, 2011*

## Part One

*Art, Auteurism, and the World*

## Chapter One / Introduction:

### *Correcting Art Cinema's Partial Vision*

#### Looking for the Elephant

“Seven Blind Mice” (1992) is a children’s story by Ed Young based on the Indian fable of the six blind men. In the story, the mice investigate a new “Something” standing by their pond. They touch it each in turn before describing it and naming it for the group. Green Mouse, having felt its long trunk, deems it a snake; Orange Mouse, having felt its floppy ear, thinks it a fan; and so on. The seventh rodent, White Mouse, takes a different tack, running all over the animal, and reports back that the first six were all wrong, for the Something was really an elephant! Ergo, the “Mouse Moral: Knowing in part may make a fine tale, but wisdom comes from knowing the whole.”<sup>2</sup>

In a figurative sense, studying art cinema is similar: to see it whole, we should run all over it. Such inquiry may not lead to wisdom, but it might put us in position to see art cinema clearly. Why isn’t this obvious? Because the ideologies and institutions that have given art cinema life and form have elicited partial views of the category—as if they were *directing* us to look only at the trunk or the ear, as if they were *telling* us to prioritize only a few parts. In such ways, this category has prompted its participants to act as individual evaluators who are always ready to restrict art cinema to its “essence.” And art-cinema insiders, forums, and promotional machineries have been specific about which kinds of phenomena are eligible for this lofty status: mainly auteurs, masterpieces, and new waves

as defined by style, creativity, meaning, and canon. Indeed, while making exceptions for themselves, even art cinema's most illegitimate participants have implied that we should focus our attention on producers in legitimate areas devoted to legitimate formats, like the traditional art film, avant-garde movie, or video-art project.

This partial vision has been informed by many determinants, including academic compartmentalization, high-art ideology, and humanity's restless quest for status. But the most overlooked factor may be our confusion over the kind of category that "art cinema" represents. Even academics have at times assumed that art cinema represents a traditional genre, i.e., an objective form produced in predictable industrial milieus and recognized through style, narrative, or meaning. But throughout film history, "art cinema" has had wider, more elastic usages, making it more akin to "mainstream cinema" or "cult cinema" than to "western" or "musical." Today, theorists of "the mainstream" or of "cult classics" recognize that these phenomena have few fixed realities outside their evaluative, context-dependent uses.<sup>3</sup> The same holds true for "art cinema"—which, over the past century, has been a term that has designated many types of cinematic forms produced through a broad, institutional array of value-oriented, oppositional processes.

Strictly speaking, then, art cinema has *no* necessary-and-sufficient conventions at the formal level. Indeed, I don't think of it as a form at all. A better way of imagining art cinema is as an idea of cinematic high art that has since the early cinema inspired value-oriented events and value-oriented institutions as well as a multitude of aspirational forms in a multitude of contexts. This category's main consistencies are rhetorical in nature, for the institutional discourses that govern art cinema regularly deploy high-art ideals such as anti-commercial purity, authorship, and aesthetic disinterest in order to justify and defend

the designation of certain movies as “art movies.” Of course, when art cinema has been treated as a specific industrial area with specific formal and historical determinants, it has often been presented as a rival of an audience-driven Hollywood cinema, for Hollywood executives have openly favored everything that these art discourses *seem* to resist, like profits, standardization, distributors and distribution, technological change, celebrity culture, and entertainment. But at the formal level, art cinema is at most a value-oriented super-genre like “mainstream cinema” or “cult cinema,” which have entailed different forms in different contexts. Its constituent works have thus been subject to more debate and re-shuffling than those unified by terms like “western.”

The implications of these relatively elementary observations are enormous. The chapters below look at these implications from various perspectives but always with the understanding that the competitive social processes energized by the art-cinema impulse have resulted in many institutions, forms, and subcultures with differential legitimacies in global societies. If we, as lay viewers, critics, students, and scholars, insist on referring to any of these things as “authentic” art cinema without qualification, we will find ourselves caught up in such processes. In the U.S., this tendency has led observers to credit postwar foreign films from Europe as the essence of art cinema, with the postclassical art cinemas accorded a lesser position and all American art cinemas seeming qualified at best.<sup>4</sup> But as scholars, we may want to be careful when taking part in such debates, which have helped *shape* this evolving category more than they have helped describe its processes. For in so doing, we could make ourselves vulnerable to the blinding power of high-art mythologies that encourage a partial, often partisan view of art cinema.

At its broadest, then, art cinema is an idea of cinematic quality. The corollary of this idea is that the movies that are called “art cinema” in a cinematic context often serve as its high art. This high-art function has not been limited to the global festival culture through which traditional art films have flourished since the Second World War. Indeed, in the U.S. alone, audiences have been making high-low distinctions since the inception of the feature film in the silent era.<sup>5</sup> But whether we are referring to the arrival of *Des cabinet des Dr. Caligari* (1919) in the U.S. or to the even earlier *film d’art* movement in France, it is clear that oppositional quality distinctions have been operative in the cinema since its beginning and that the idea of cinema as “art” in the honorific sense has not been limited to the most legitimate or “official” art cinemas as we now perceive them. Hence, as the cinema has proliferated, so has the use of these value distinctions. As I argue in Chapter Six, a similar oppositional utility has for the past fifty years even been available to institutions and people in culturally debased, marginalized cinematic sectors, like the porn industry. In other words, “Hollywood art cinema” is hardly the oddest kind of art cinema to have emerged during the course of film history.

Today, the standard history of art cinema pays lip-service to the avant-gardes that emerged in Europe in the 1920s and 1930s but most often focuses on the growing cultural currency that the various new waves achieved in the 1950s and 1960s through the festival culture that emerged in the postwar era, circulating auteur vehicles to art houses across the globe.<sup>6</sup> But before focusing on these histories, we should recognize the relevance of even longer histories. Clearly, the early usage of “art film” and “art cinema” in the silent-film era bears examination. And the cultural separation of the high or the fine arts from the more popular arts, or crafts, in the Renaissance merits attention, too. But if we want a

full grasp of the human processes that have led to this category, we should have a basic concept of how such processes relate to human development.

The proliferation of the art-cinema category has resembled that of art generally, for it has adapted to shifting human conditions, making it resilient, plural. To grasp this category's ultimate roots, then, we should examine the roots of art as a whole. Today, the most intriguing glimpses into the origins of art are coming from theorists in evolutionary biology, who view the ability to make or consume art as direct adaptations that conferred reproductive and survival benefits on our ancestors *or* as byproducts of adaptations like a big brain, which evolved for other uses. For twenty years or so, Darwinian literary critics like Joseph Carroll and evolutionary aestheticians like the late Denis Dutton have used research in evolutionary psychology and cultural evolution as a conduit between C.P. Snow's "two cultures," allowing them to generate biocultural insights in the humanities that are based on the premise that art is a product of "human nature," which is itself the product of selective pressures. But if biocultural ideas can offer many useful hypotheses pertaining to the origin, persistence, and proliferation of art cinema as a form of art, they currently tell us very little about art cinema's cultural development. What we need when studying art cinema is a theory that is open to scientific evidence so that later scholars—who will know more than we do about how biology works through culture—will not be forced to dispense with our ideas simply to improve them.

In my view, the optimal framework for this purpose is one that starts by assuming the obvious: as a species, humanity has material origins and constraints that have resulted in a fairly predictable (albeit very creative and still evolving) phenomenon called "human nature." When we add this bedrock assumption to the best humanities scholarship, that

scholarship becomes more defensible. For example, as Edward Slingerland has argued in *What Science Offers the Humanities* (2008), even Pierre Bourdieu's crucial sociological research on art, taste, and status becomes more sensible once we imagine it against the "background of evolved human preferences and motivations." Had Bourdieu eschewed the social-constructionist premises so common in sociology and the humanities, he would have told a more "plausible story about how the sorts of novel, idiosyncratic, high-level cultural- or class-specific distinctions" that he "analyzed and catalogued with such nuance" were "grounded in basic and universal human capacities and dispositions."<sup>7</sup> In the chapters that follow, then, I refer on occasion to biocultural ideas, showing how they can update our theories, opening avenues that would have been impassable under the assumptions of previous theoretical regimes in film studies. At the same time, I am, I hope, honest about the tenuous nature of biocultural ideas, especially when they become too specific or are assigned a greater theoretical burden than they can currently bear. It is up to later film scholars to push along these trails, which theorists like myself are mainly opening for them—or are *leaving* open for them, which is itself a task. Of course, I take it for granted that the theorists who blaze these trails later on will already have a grasp of art cinema's roots in post-Renaissance culture as well as its more immediate roots in film history. To ensure this, my next section offers a sketch of some of the historical events that have shaped the history of art cinema as it currently exists. The chapters that follow will frequently draw on this sketch, adding detail as they go.

### Brief Historical Sketch

As cultural historians like Lawrence Levine and Larry Shiner have demonstrated, a combination of revolutionary market pressures and novel philosophical ideas led post-

Renaissance western culture to divide the once monolithic category of “art,” which had formerly referred to everything from chamber music and portraiture to popular narratives and embroidery, into fine art and useful “craft,” refining and diversifying these high-low divisions until they reached their apotheosis in the modernist era (and almost collapsed under postmodernity).<sup>8</sup> The Industrial Revolution exacerbated this process, enhancing the symbolic value of items produced without mercenary intent or “interest.” Eventually, this broad historical trend produced the Romantic era and its Art for Art’s Sake movement, which claimed that true art was fully disinterested, antithetical to utility and to all didactic content. Indeed, by the late nineteenth century, artists hoping to share in the symbolic value accorded to “fine” or “pure” art could not necessarily lionize craft as they once had. The media with the most popularity in that period, including fairly recent forms like the novel and photography, were notable for their insecurity, for in western nations, the “art” signifier no longer served as a straightforward identity based on craft-oriented properties like artifice, realism, or narration. This classification had also become a status secured in cultural competitions wherein popularity often led to suspicion. Thus, nineteenth-century practitioners of art novels and art photography felt compelled to distinguish their works from “mere” genre fictions or “mere” records of reality.

In the twentieth century, similar social pressures led film producers to recapitulate this process of cultural stratification. The fact that cinema was popular from the start with the working classes and the young made the medium worrisome to the cultural guardians who exerted influence over cultural status. Ergo, in the U.S., cinema was under attack by Progressives almost from the moment storefront theaters began “exposing” the working classes to the “nickel madness” around 1905.<sup>9</sup> Thereafter, in 1907, authorities in the U.S.

and abroad began enacting prior censorship ordinances meant to control the distribution and exhibition of a medium many considered dangerous.

Considering these difficulties, it is no wonder that many film producers and film distributors sought to elevate the cinema's status through specialized forms. An example of this phenomenon was the *film d'art* movement in France, which began before 1910. French producers like Charles Le Bargy, hoping to gain a more educated audience and raise the status of their work, began using literary adaptations and theatrical techniques in films such as *L'assassinat du duc de Guise* (1908). As a self-conscious attempt to create "art films," these efforts drew attention but could not ultimately survive financially—and film critics have often condemned their producers for failing to innovate in a specifically cinematic, as opposed to a theatrical, way. That said, the movement created a significant precedent for looking at cinema as an aspirational form that could enjoy the same high-culture status that was enjoyed at the start of the century by elite forms of theater. In this respect, the *film d'art* movement paved the way for the self-conscious avant-gardes that made art films in Europe after the First World War. These movements included French Impressionism, German expressionism, Neue Sachlichkeit, Soviet montage, etc., all of which A.L. Rees and other scholars still call "Art Cinema."<sup>10</sup>

Equally vital to raising the profile of the film-as-art idea were new distribution paradigms, including those of the *film d'art* movement, and new exhibition contexts, such as little cinemas, *ciné-clubs*, museum theaters, and even film festivals.<sup>11</sup> These new sites of exhibition emerged between 1908 and 1940, helping to circulate the ideas of film-art theorists, like Ricciotto Canudo and Vachel Lindsay, and making it more acceptable for intellectuals to discuss cinema as art, especially in the European nations most conducive

to the practice, like France and Italy.<sup>12</sup> During the interwar period, Hollywood focused on expanding its industrial hegemony by investing principally in the most commercially dominant forms of narrative “entertainment.” Nevertheless, Hollywood also circulated the film-art idea through its technical experimentation, through the artistry of individual practitioners like Charlie Chaplin, and through the formation of the Academy system, which promoted the status of varieties of Hollywood film.<sup>13</sup>

Clearly, there were many opportunities for discussing “art films” and “art cinema” prior to the Second World War that were encouraged by a significant, albeit nascent, art-cinema infrastructure that in select European capitals had succeeded in making art cinema a fairly mainstream concept. But it was not until the postwar era that art cinema became the key to reviving various European film industries—and, later, to reviving Hollywood as well. One of the root causes of this complex historical process was the disarray that the European industries found themselves in after the War. With their home markets flooded by Hollywood imports, Europeans turned to subsidies and to an “art” strategy in order to turn their industries around and reclaim markets. The state-subsidized art films that were the result had stable financing behind them and were often mainstream critical favorites, for their aspirationalism was couched in a relatively commercial narrative format. These art films were feted at major festivals, like Venice and Cannes, and were often exported to the U.S., which was the most crucial film market due to its size, wealth, and influence on global film distribution. In this way, the postwar art cinemas solved problems that had marginalized earlier art cinemas like the *film d’art* movement.

In the U.S., these European art cinemas were screened on an expanding art-house circuit that was in the 1940s and 1950s situated on the peripheries “between” exploitation

exhibition and Hollywood exhibition. This circuit, which had developed in urban areas and university towns over the decades, had long exposed Americans to a strategically eclectic mix of exploitation movies and foreign art films, which were in many respects equally obscene in the minds of viewers used to the niceties of Hollywood sublimation as regulated by the Production Code.<sup>14</sup> But it was only after the War, during the advent of Italian neorealism, that distributors honed and expanded a more specialized model for exhibiting art films—and on a massive scale.<sup>15</sup> Often modeled on the “refined” exhibition practices of the Film Library of the Museum of Modern Art, the U.S. art house civilized illicit glimpses of human flesh through trappings of gentility: the Francophilic promotion, the wine and cheese, the expert lectures, the air of obligatory disinterest. This exhibition circuit was engineered to sell European and Asian art films as eroticized but inoffensive forms of high art.<sup>16</sup> For more than two decades, this business formula gave the art film an unprecedented vogue in the U.S., where its “opportunity space” was also enhanced by the return of soldiers from Europe, increases in education, status advantages imparted by the growth of television, and a booming postwar economy.<sup>17</sup>

Beyond their artistic and sexual cachet, these postwar foreign art films profited from two other advantages in the U.S. First, in the postwar period, Hollywood’s control over its home market was being corroded by Supreme Court rulings even as its popularity with its domestic audience was declining due to the introduction of television and other leisure pursuits. Hollywood’s control over its home market had long been guaranteed by censorship. The authority of early American censorship ordinances had been codified through the Court’s decision in *Mutual Film Corporation v. Industrial Commission of Ohio* (1915), which ruled that cinema was a business, not an art or an act of speech that

deserved free-speech protection.<sup>18</sup> This ruling established the legality of censorship in the U.S., making Hollywood films subject to various regulatory bodies. In a defensive move, Hollywood moved to regulate itself through self-censorship in the 1920s and to this end began enforcing its Production Code in 1934. However, because they also controlled film exhibition through vertical integration, Hollywood executives did not need to worry too much about the occasional successes of foreign art films, including *Ecstasy* (1933), or of domestic exploitation films, like *Mom and Dad* (1945). But this confidence shrank once the Supreme Court began shaking the foundations of Hollywood at the same moment that its audiences were being fragmented by new cinemas like Italian neorealism. The main event in this long history was the Paramount decision of 1948, which disrupted a classical Hollywood system that had been built on vertical integration.

The collapse of the Hollywood system that followed the Paramount Decrees made many art cinemas more readily available to exhibitors. Suddenly, exhibitors could choose their own bookings, and classic art films and experimental underground films frequently proved lucrative, a development that Hollywood producers noticed fast.<sup>19</sup> These trends were furthered when the Supreme Court overturned its *Mutual* ruling in *Burstyn v. Wilson* (1952), which suggested that European art films like Roberto Rossellini's neorealist film *The Miracle* (1948) were art and that similar films, however sexy, deserved constitutional protections. With the censors in retreat, more distributors and exhibitors felt comfortable taking on sexualized foreign art films in a postwar period during which most Hollywood producers were shackled by systematic self-censorship.

Again, these new competitive advantages were aided by the declining popularity of the cinema as a whole. In fact, as Shyon Baumann has argued, this rapid decline was

the major factor in the cultural elevation of film in the postwar era, for it neutralized the factor (i.e., cinema's attractiveness to the working class<sup>20</sup>) that had made the middle class anxious about cinema, allowing it to revalue cinema as a high art. And in this period, a new idea, *la politique des auteurs*, was imported from Europe by American critic Andrew Sarris. Though Sarris and other critics initially used "the auteur theory" to defend their judgment of the value of certain Hollywood movies by certain Hollywood directors, it was quickly applied to the many foreign art films helmed by Italian, Swedish, and French auteurs, from Rossellini and Ingmar Bergman to Michelangelo Antonioni and Jean-Luc Godard. Especially in the U.S., the idea of authorship central to the auteur theory was crucial to persuading an American audience schooled on Hollywood's anti-auteurist values and practices to re-see the cinema as an artist-directed medium with high-art potential. Indeed, auteurism was so successful in elevating foreign art films to the distinction of high art that these films, with their promise of sex and status, became more lucrative than ever.<sup>21</sup> And auteurism gave academics the tools to claim an irreducible disciplinary specificity. As a result, many major universities had incorporated film studies into their humanities curricula by the 1970s.<sup>22</sup> This development was especially crucial to the stability of avant-garde art cinemas, whose practitioners gained a secure place to produce, exhibit, and teach experimental work.<sup>23</sup>

But the auteurs and their theories may have had their greatest impact through their direct influence on Hollywood. With its business model coming apart amid the ongoing reverberations of the Paramount decision, Hollywood became more open to innovation. In the late 1950s and early 1960s, the studios bought art-film distributors and began co-producing foreign art films. But Hollywood's most crucial experiment seems to have

been the scrapping of the Code for a ratings system in 1968 and the re-ordering of the studio system such that Euro-style directors like Stanley Kubrick, Arthur Penn, Martin Scorsese, and Robert Altman had substantial new freedoms. These moves disrupted the market for foreign art-films in the U.S. in that the emergence of the auteur-driven New Hollywood made it possible to exhibit adult-oriented Hollywood art movies, causing “the foreign film” to lose its cachet in the U.S., as Sarris noted in 1999.<sup>24</sup> In time, this business model would fracture, too, with Hollywood retreating from its auteur excess after the flop of *Heaven’s Gate* (1980). But by the late 1980s, a new “indie” movement had revived the auteur zeal so prominent in the 1970s. This American wave gained momentum through technological change: the coming of home video created opportunities for independent producers and distributors.<sup>25</sup> Later, this market showed such promise that Hollywood again took notice. Hence, since the 1990s, the indie-style studios, which are the art-house divisions of majors like Sony, Disney, or Fox, have dominated and once again disrupted the market for independent art cinemas in the U.S. market.<sup>26</sup>

From this sketch, we can see that there have been many categories of art cinema present in global circulation since the silent era. In the U.S., these categories would carry different labels, such as “avant-garde,” “video art,” “foreign,” “mainstream,” or “indie,” depending on their relative cultural positions and their usual distribution networks, with overlap always possible. But the decline of the classical Hollywood system, along with the mainstreaming of auteurism and the postwar wealth of the American market, meant the U.S. market, like other developed markets, would become far more segmented and stratified in the 1950s, inundated with independent productions of all types by all types of directors—some of whom were self-styled auteurs before they ever directed anything.

Often, these auteurs got their initial directing gigs in the 1980s amid the “cult” networks that exploded at the start of the video era, when many low-budget directors like Doris Wishman, Roger Corman, and Dario Argento were first elevated. Inevitably, these populist networks, which developed their own film festivals, promotional machineries, and modes of distribution, exhibition, and reception, also developed cult hierarchies, with domestic and foreign auteurs producing “cult classics,” a category that could encompass movies peculiarly valued as “cult art movies.” These art cinemas were differentiated from others in that their participants exuded a conflicted attitude toward their own *subcultural* legitimacy (and their own *potential* cultural legitimacy). Though the high-art urge toward quality and value is fairly unproblematic even in mainstream art cinemas, this impulse is complicated in cult art cinemas by the fact that cult networks and cult concepts mystify illegitimate things, ideas, and forms of status. Hence, a confusing, utterly wild variety of art cinema was born during the late twentieth century, one whose illegitimacy was often valued by insiders as a mark of its subcultural authenticity. Of all the art cinemas, cult art cinema is the least understood variety within academe.

### Overcoming Art Cinema’s Partial Vision in the Academy

Though brief, the history sketched above should convey the truth of art cinema: i.e., that it is a high-art function of the cinema that has been manifest in different ways in different industries, subcultures, and market niches. Why has this not been recognized? Or, specifically, why is art cinema in the U.S. still often boiled down to postwar foreign art films? There are, of course, many reasons. Academics have not in the past been aware of the full history of high-art ideas in the cinema; have not always studied the obvious cases of cult art cinema that would have made them more cognizant of art cinema’s subcultural

potential; and have at times been too deferential to the formalist categories of scholars with cinephile habits whose classifications have reflected the the most traditional cultural stratifications. The last problem has been the thorniest, I think, when excellent scholars such as David Bordwell or Dudley Andrew have produced very knowledgeable, nuanced scholarship around traditional ideas of art cinema.

Earlier, I noted that academic compartmentalization was one reason that partial visions of art cinema have persisted in academia. But if this compartmentalization is part of the problem, it is also part of the solution. Let me explain. The past two decades have witnessed the ascendancy of historicism in film studies, a scholarly trend that has made it possible to write the history of art cinema sketched above. Hence, studies like Barbara Wilinsky's *Sure Seaters: The Emergence of Art House Cinema* (2001), Haidee Wasson's *Museum Movies: The Museum of Modern Art and the Birth of Art Cinema* (2005), and Thomas Elsaesser's *European Cinema: Face to Face with Hollywood* (2005) have been appearing with regularity. These studies have charted art cinema's history, analyzing its industrial apparatus, global circulation, and distinctive appeal. And lately, similar studies have proliferated more quickly. New monographs like András Bálint Kovács's *Screening Modernism: European Art Cinema, 1950-1980* (2007), Geoffrey Nowell-Smith's *Making Waves: New Cinemas of the 1960s* (2008), Mark Betz's *Beyond the Subtitle: Remapping European Art Cinema* (2009), Tino Balio's *The Foreign Film Renaissance on American Screens, 1946-1973* (2010), and Michael Z. Newman's *Indie: An American Film Culture* (2011)—not to mention useful collections that include Barry Keith Grant's *Auteurs and Authorship* (2008), Rosalind Galt and Karl Schoonover's *Global Art Cinema: New Theories and Histories* (2010), and Dominique Russell's *Rape in Art Cinema* (2010)—

have been appearing at a rapid clip. Casebooks on cinephilia have also been released as crossover publications and as portfolios in peer-reviewed journals.<sup>27</sup> The result of all this activity is that theorists now have a plethora of credible scholarly resources with which to “re-see” art cinema, none of which existed in the auteur era or in the era of grand theory that followed in film studies. Though the (relatively) narrow parameters of these studies have made it difficult for their authors to see the whole of art cinema—which has often led them to designate certain art cinemas, such as postwar art films, as the “real” thing—more synthetic theories of art cinema that draw on *all* this historical work can look across these narrow parameters in order to see the elephant whole.

One theorist who has achieved an admirable balance of breadth, depth, and rigor is Baumann, a sociologist who fuses the new film-historical research with sociological methods and goals in *Hollywood Highbrow: From Entertainment to Art* (2007). Though not perfect,<sup>28</sup> Baumann’s theory is valuable for three reasons. First, it offers a useful model for film theorists. Baumann is unafraid to integrate different kinds of historical research into his sociological method, and the result is a scholarly analysis that is both meticulous and holistic. Baumann’s theory is likewise helpful in that it offers a three-part “legitimation framework” that explains how the cinema was legitimated as an art form in the U.S. in the postwar era.<sup>29</sup> Thus, Baumann takes time to explain *how* this phenomenon occurred through shifts in the culture, industrial developments, and refinements in the ways that critics and scholars talked about movies at the technical level. Baumann’s point is to show how these transformations led to the consecration of the New Hollywood as a legitimate form of high art. In the process, Baumann confirms that an entertainment industry devoted to mass distribution could under the right conditions be deemed capable

of producing high art. This aspect of Baumann's analysis will prove useful to us when we consider art cinema's hierarchies of value, including the differential cultural legitimacies of mainstream art cinema, of cult art cinema, and the like.

Despite the value of Baumann's book, *Hollywood Highbrow* still focuses most of its attention on just one untraditional (albeit briefly legitimate) variety of art cinema. But monographs like Wilinsky's and collections like Galt and Schoonover's give many hints at how films now valued mainly as "cult" vehicles have developed subculturally but have also managed to circulate through legitimate cultural networks. This is why contemporary theorists must be familiar with the subcultural workings of cult fields covered in books like Joan Hawkins's *Cutting Edge: Art-Horror and the Horrific Avant-garde* (2000) or my own *Soft in the Middle: The Contemporary Softcore Feature in its Contexts* (2006)—and it is also why they should subject indispensable collections like *Defining Cult Movies* (2003) and *The Cult Film Reader* (2008) to careful study.<sup>30</sup>

One of the main engines driving the rise of the illegitimate cult art cinemas since the 1960s has been auteurism. After the Second World War, auteurism was a boon to the legitimate art cinemas, helping to consolidate and enlarge their central institutions. It is no wonder, then, that auteurism also proved inspirational in art cinema's less legitimate areas. After all, directors were able to emulate the auteur profile in low-budget sectors, from the Italian *giallo* to hardcore porn, as easily as they emulated it in more legitimate, higher-budget areas. Unfortunately, auteurism and the high-art ideals that inform it have also blocked theorization of this "unofficial" auteurism. Few theorists have been prepared to deal with the basic fact that auteurism justifies the aspirations of exploitation directors just as easily as it justifies those of Hollywood directors or of European directors—and

few books have attempted to sort out the messy connections linking traditional art films, foreign art films, avant-garde movies, and video-art projects to mainstream art movies and cult art movies, including exploitation and porn.

The goal of this study, then, is straightforward: to create a broad, synthetic theory of art cinema that resists high-art mythologies and throws off, where prudent, disciplinary blinders so as to see art cinema whole. This approach takes it for granted that we should neither restrict nor orient our insights according to our appreciation for specific formats, new waves, auteurs, art-house styles, or cinephile tastes. Though our deeply informed knowledge of these phenomena is what makes a study such as this a work of film studies and not one of sociology, it can help us only if it is kept in the background, where it can flesh out our theory, not dictate it. Instead, we should look for the elephant by examining this category in three ways. First, we should connect the historicist dots, so to speak, and look *across* the new historical accounts that have documented art cinema's industrial and cultural background. Second, we should learn from accounts of other super-genres such as cult cinema and mainstream cinema, categories that might not seem all that relevant here until we consider just how contingent and intertwined the subcultural ideas of legitimacy that undergird super-generic notions such as "art cinema," "cult cinema," and "mainstream cinema" really are. And third, as film theorists, we should always be ready to learn what we can from other branches of the humanities, like art history and the philosophy of art, and from fields outside the humanities, like sociology, anthropology, and evolutionary biology. They have much to teach us.

Preview of *Theory of Art Cinemas*

This book consists of three main sections. The second chapter of the first section develops a definition of art cinema that construes it as a high-art phenomenon specific to cinema. In this definition, art cinema is an unfolding, super-generic event in which artists, promoters, and audiences typically reject a devalued, seemingly commercialized idea of the movie as a genre vehicle. Movies assigned to this category often secure their status through institutional means or through context-reliant canonical processes. The resulting complexity has plagued art-cinema scholars with problems of definition similar to those that once plagued philosophers of art bent on defining “art.”

Chapter Three moves on to auteurism, detailing the history of the auteur theory and distinguishing it from auteurism as such. Though the auteurist attitude has problems, auteurism has been a heuristic well suited to the human mind. As a result, it has been so useful in art cinema’s development that it has generated tools that scholars may use to identify art cinema in traditional *and* untraditional areas. Clearly, we should continue to underline auteurism’s problems to avoid the human tendency to lapse into celebrations of the auteur. But because auteurism is unlikely to go away, we should also find legitimate uses for it. One such method is to use auteurism as a tool that can show us how and where untraditional art cinemas like “cult art cinema” have arisen; this method expands our idea of art cinema even as it resists regressive uses of auteurism.

Chapter Four, the first section’s final chapter, looks at the terms “foreign films” and “world cinema” in the U.S. Until the late 1960s, “foreign films” denoted an “exotic” oppositional cinema identified with postwar art films; the success of these films led to industrial changes that encouraged Hollywood producers to begin distributing and then making art cinema. This had the effect of bringing foreign and domestic producers closer

together, eroding the marketability of this class of films and increasingly exposing the insensitivity of the term that lumped them together. Ergo, “foreign films” has gradually been replaced in college classes and retail outlets by “world cinema,” a more neutral term that reverses the old perspective, implying that “the foreign,” not the U.S. or Hollywood, *is* “the world.” In academia, though, this classifying usage has remained controversial, for some see it as still placing Hollywood at the “core” of cinema, since “world cinema” has rarely been used as a blanket term that includes Hollywood. The irony is that this practice puts world cinema at the “periphery” of cinema as we know it.

The second section of the book focuses on four broad art-cinema formats. Chapter Five looks at “the traditional art film,” a format with so much cultural capital that it serves as a recovery-and-legitimation machine in mainstream film culture. In the U.S., an art film of this category does not currently have to be praised or even liked to qualify as art cinema; instead, such a film merely has to fulfill its own institutional requirements. This is why today’s indie art film, including its Hollywood variants, may be classified as forms of art cinema: this feature-length narrative plays in festivals and in art houses and is circulated by specialty labels such that it functions as art cinema no less than art films from Europe, Asia, Africa, Australia, or Latin America. However, the most distinctive evidence that the traditional art film works as a recovery-and-legitimation machine is that this format has recovered debased contents, like hardcore sex, for viewers in mainstream art houses. In this way, we may see art-cinema participants exercising the “free pass” that has made art cinema so successful in global distribution.

Chapter Six describes cult cinema as an oppositional cinema that has endorsed an active audience and that embraces its own genre-based commercialism. Thus, cult cinema

diverges quite far from high-art ideology, leading to an illegitimate form of mystification that is capable of fetishizing works from across the cultural spectrum but that focuses at the consumer level on inexpensive, lowbrow movies in sexploitation, horror, etc. At the institutional level, this mystification has resulted in canonical processes and in the idea of the “cult classic.” These canons and classics have on occasion made high-art claims that have been recognized in cult subcultures; on even rarer occasions, such claims have made cult films candidates for recovery by legitimate institutions. Ergo, these cult-art cinemas exemplify cult phenomena even as their aspiration to, or achievement of, high-art status threatens to erase their cult identity through legitimation.

Chapter Seven looks at American experimental cinema. It traces this prestigious yet marginalized art-cinema form through its roots in Europe and distinguishes it by way of distribution from the feature-length experimental art films made by directors like Jean-Luc Godard and from the video art that is a staple of museum-based art installations. The most concrete area of this experimental cinema is the coop avant-garde, which has since the 1960s been defined by its nominally anti-commercial system of coop distribution. This chapter focuses on the anti-institutional rhetoric of this movement so as to explore how this rhetoric has created “anti-” institutions while generating distinctive problems for avant-garde artists, their institutions, and the external institutions such as the academy that have sustained this purist cinema over the decades.

As the final chapter of the second section, Chapter Eight re-thinks the term “the mainstream” so as to make sense of a seeming oxymoron, “mainstream art cinema.” This chapter proposes that mainstream cinemas usually contain far more complexity than the derogatory connotations of the term “mainstream” imply. Indeed, cinemas of mainstream

size and scope have frequently contained art-cinema canons, complete with mainstream art cinemas, within their own diffuse boundaries. To demonstrate this basic point, I take a brief look at various Hollywood art cinemas and consider the presence of mainstream art cinemas in a wide array of world cinemas and cult cinemas.

The third and final section of this book focuses on institutions, with an emphasis on distribution. Chapter Nine proposes that cinephiles have lavished attention on high-art issues like auteurism and style while often ignoring far more commercial concerns like stardom, technology, and reception. This approach belies the fact that, as scholars have shown, art cinema is no less involved with its stars, technology, and reception than other genres. Though its promoters have feigned an indifference to stars, they have depended on the process of “niche stardom.” What is more, the presence of a new kind of star in art cinema, the auteur, has resulted in subcultural synergies that have often shielded actors, audiences, and distributors from censure, freeing female actors in particular to exploit their own sexuality without fear of career-ending scandal.

Chapter Ten looks at art-cinema institutions, focusing its attention on the art-house circuit, the film-festival circuit, and the academic discipline of film studies. These global institutions have played major roles in promoting and anchoring auteurism in art cinema—and the combination of art cinema’s auteurism and its festival-based circulation has reinforced its tendency toward a heterogeneity of style and theme. Consequently, this chapter argues that this formal heterogeneity is best understood not through a narrative- or form-based methodology but through a culturalism that relates the genre’s diversity to institutions like the art house, the festival, and film studies.

Chapter Eleven argues that art cinema's promoters have had little choice but to cast the genre in misleading terms as "anti-commercial." After all, this purist rhetoric is one of the defining features of high art wherever it has been manifest. However, this rhetoric is so vague that it can be applied to most movies; indeed, critics can even apply it to an "art blockbuster" if they can argue that such a movie has a non-commercial "spirit." But if it is easy to see through this rhetoric, it is hard to dislodge it; like auteurism, anti-commercial rhetoric is not going away just because it is easily exposed. Still, we can, as academics, avoid this rhetoric—for it is not as hard to discuss art cinema in its absence as it is to discuss art cinema in the absence of auteurist rhetoric.

The conclusion, Chapter Twelve, moves toward a distribution theory in order to develop an extended definition of movie distribution that interfaces with many different cultural phenomena inside and outside the movie industry. By moving beyond "the bad old story" of distribution (which casts distribution agents in a uniformly negative light) as well as the "transit" metaphor (which sees distribution as little more than a pipeline), we can begin to see how movie distribution interacts with various forms of cultural capital and with crucial generic concepts. We can also begin to grasp the impact of distribution on cinematic form *especially* in high-art categories, where the concept of "the free pass" is essential to the forms that art cinema has assumed. In the end, this theory of circulation gives us another means of looking at art cinema holistically.

The epilogue of this book focuses on the theme of cinephilia. The affection for the cinema implicit to this term has long been identified with art cinema. Thus, cinephilia is a crucial albeit squishy issue that combines our physiological responsiveness to art with our human capacity for love; indeed, it is an affection that has indirectly built art cinema's

premiere institutions, such as the festival circuit. But as art cinema has fragmented and proliferated, so has cinephilia, to the point that aesthetes can no longer defend it in terms of an exclusive community of cinephiles (i.e., “the happy few”).

## Chapter Two / Art as Genre as Canon: *Defining “Art Cinema”*

### A Needy, Altogether Necessary Term

In his remarkable 1981 article “Art Cinema as Institution,” Steve Neale noted that “art cinema” had rarely been defined as a cinematic concept.<sup>31</sup> Over time, the failure of scholars to confront this foundational notion has led to a situation in which the term has become, according to Eleftheria Thanouli, “one of the fuzziest and yet least controversial concepts in film studies.”<sup>32</sup> Lately, however, theorists like Thanouli, Andrew Tudor, Karl Schoonover, Rosalind Galt, András Bálint Kovács, and Mark Betz have shown renewed interest in this term and its several offshoots. Thus, in a recent analysis, Tudor points to the peculiarity of the term “art movie” by observing that in “everyday discourse we do not speak of ‘art novel,’ ‘art picture’ or ‘art music’.”<sup>33</sup> Tudor is alluding to something that has long irritated the ex-composition teacher in me. “Art cinema” sounds redundant, even a bit *needy*. This is a category of cinema, the term almost shouts, that is also a form of art. Point taken, I guess; but what else could fiction movies be?

*Non-art*, naturally. I imagine that readers of this book will be dissatisfied with this answer; for me, it borders on offensive. Nevertheless, it may be a measure of art cinema’s success that we feel this way. Though the cinema was, at the beginning of the twentieth century, a self-conscious medium that had to struggle hard in the U.S. (as in many other

countries outside of France and Italy) to establish its high-art credentials, that battle has been so clearly won by the medium's status-heavy strains that *all* movies, not just the art films and cult films that claim a special distinctiveness, stand revealed at the start of this century as art. Of course, it is not just film history that has led us to this conclusion.<sup>34</sup> The postmodernist "leveling" of so much contemporary discourse has modified centuries of hierarchical, post-Renaissance thought in the humanities. Throughout the academy, "art" no longer has the exclusionary resonance it once had.

But to say that "art" no longer has the resonance it once had in the academy is not to say it has lost its privileged place in our culture. This explains why the honorific sense of "art cinema" is illogical but still has market value in mainstream movie criticism, at film festivals, and in the art houses that still operate. This honorific usage is also useful in college courses and in quasi-academic, crossover magazines where a sort of film studies justifies itself to the world by showcasing its conservative views. Ultimately, it is not too much to speculate that this status-oriented idea of cinema may be rooted in evolutionary capacities and preferences, which often favor high-status phenomena regardless of the truth-value of their distinction. But despite all this utility, Tudor for one seems ready to say *yes*, the term is obsolete. The primary reason he feels this way owes, I think, to the weight his "Bourdieu-style analysis" places on art houses, which formed an alternative exhibition circuit that has long been challenged by forces of consumerist fragmentation.<sup>35</sup> But I believe this fragmentation, though real, has not signaled the decline of art cinema so much as the decline of a narrow, unitary perception of it.

Tudor believes that art cinema's claims to intrinsic value were ultimately rooted in the elevation of art over commerce that grew out of many post-Renaissance market

pressures. Consequently, the art house, which was devoted to the film-as-art approach, created a highbrow preserve where art cinema “could be defended as relatively immune” from market “pollution and utilized as a basis for establishing distinction and symbolic capital.”<sup>36</sup> But the past decades have, according to Tudor, seen the decline of the art-house circuit and the “fall” of the art movie. This explains the elegiac note of his ending, where he deems the “pluralisation of the field” as largely dential to the decline of art cinema.<sup>37</sup> “Meanwhile, there has been a proliferation of sectarian audiences,” he notes. “What was once primarily the domain of the artistic *avant garde* now hosts cult movies, the ‘fans’ who cluster around, for example, video distributed horror or semi-pornographic material to which they attribute aesthetic, moral, or social radicalism, as well as the kind of independent cinema familiar in earlier periods.”<sup>38</sup>

But it is hard to understand why a “proliferation” must be considered identical to a decline. This is tantamount, I think, to assuming that television must have declined after the advent of cable television and its programming diversities—which is hardly the case. Regarding art cinema, “proliferation” is better viewed as a peculiarly hierarchical form of democratization that has spread this category’s aestheticist ideology in many directions at once, expanding art cinema’s scope even as it has diffused the power of any one site of exhibition. After all, as Tudor realizes, it is not as if the rhetoric of the art house *ever* had logic on its side. Though art-house rhetoric did aid art cinema’s original exhibitors by obscuring the economics of this ostensibly pure-art area, such rhetoric could not erase art cinema’s “ineradicably commercial character.”<sup>39</sup> Indeed, film historians have shown that the art house was never a monolithic repository of “art-house taste.”<sup>40</sup> It was always a pluralist bazaar, interchanging sexploitation, horror, and mondo movies with an *ad hoc*

muddle of traditionally highbrow “foreign films.” If art cinema could survive in these transparently commercial circumstances, it is less difficult to believe that it could thrive under current conditions, where its consecration is abetted by art-plexes that screen indie-style films and by fanzines, blogs, and DVD “extras” that tirelessly anoint auteurs in an age of home consumption.<sup>41</sup> Such conditions may seem profit-oriented by comparison with the cultural circumstances surrounding the art houses of the 1950s and 1960s, but this opinion may owe more to a sanitized, even celebratory memory of the “classic” cinephile era than to a clear-eyed view of current events.

Still, if we can go wrong by identifying the genre with a single site of exhibition, we can also go wrong by identifying it with cinematic forms derived from a single set of new waves. Take, for instance, David Bordwell’s “The Art Cinema as a Mode of Film Practice” (1979), which remains by far the most influential expression of the traditionalist position in art-cinema scholarship. In it, Bordwell claims that “the art cinema as a distinct mode appears after the Second World War when the dominance of Hollywood cinema was beginning to wane.”<sup>42</sup> From there, he focuses on realism, authorship, and ambiguity as manifested in the narrative of postwar European art cinema.<sup>43</sup> Though Bordwell admits that many scholars deem art cinema a uniquely heterogeneous genre, he is confident that its “narrative and stylistic principles” remain “remarkably constant.”<sup>44</sup> Unfortunately, as later scholars like Thanouli have shown, this aspect of Bordwell’s argument was bound to prove unfeasible, no matter how compelling and sophisticated it was—for the fact is that it has been refuted by the increasing diversity of a status-oriented category that producers of every background have found desirable.<sup>45</sup> It is for this reason that Galt and Schoonover call art cinema a “mongrel” genre defined by “impurity.”<sup>46</sup>

Indeed, if we can agree that art cinema has, since the silent era, been a diverse genre whose traditional cultural function has, since the days of the *film d'art* movement, been to consecrate film, to elevate it, then Bordwell's project, though executed expertly, will seem suspect. Though his method is historical, it is also evaluative, emphasizing art-historical ideas of art cinema by way of preferred movements and forms; and it achieves all this by reinforcing an opposition between art cinema and Hollywood.<sup>47</sup> With very few exceptions,<sup>48</sup> theorists are today abandoning the traditionalist position and insisting on art cinema's diversity.<sup>49</sup> There is an awareness that, regarding form, the designation has a "nebulous" reality<sup>50</sup>—with the corollary that the term "art cinema" is "capacious enough and flexible enough" to tolerate different styles and audiences.<sup>51</sup> But this awareness has also resulted in a new problem: the tendency to assert that a term that is "notoriously difficult to define" has no value.<sup>52</sup> Thus, Thanouli argues that when "a category like 'art cinema' becomes so diluted over the years that it can contain practically everything, it is inevitably dried of any theoretical edge that it might have possessed in the past."<sup>53</sup> This tendency to give up on "art cinema" as soon as its diversity is noticed is also manifest in *The Cinema Book*, where Angela Ndalani has observed that "[a] clear-cut definition of art cinema has always been elusive, increasingly so in recent years. As the boundaries that separate mainstream and art cinema practices become more porous, the question 'Is there such a thing as art cinema?' comes to the fore."<sup>54</sup>

I understand, respect the impulse to make such statements and ask such questions, but in the end they sound like excuses for burying our heads in sand. Art cinema clearly exists as a perception in actual brains and as a shifting set of events and things unified and impelled by that perception. "Art cinema" in this sense exists on Netflix, in

Blockbuster, at Facets Multimedia. It also exists at Cannes, Sundance, Toronto, Pusan. It exists in the pages of *Film Comment*, *Cineaste*, *Positif*, and *Cahiers du cinéma*. And it exists in many formats and subcultures, for it exists in fanzines, at cult festivals, and in classrooms and chat rooms. Art cinema is useful and desirable, tapping into a very human preference for status and hierarchy, so it is widespread, multiform, and ever-changing. Why should we, as film scholars, question whether it “really” exists at this point in time when if anything it seems more prevalent than ever before? My feeling is not that we dislike the category’s diversity so much as we are intimidated by it. For as Thanouli shows, the new formal diversity simply overwhelms all the old theories. But we can no longer afford to simplify this category’s diversity just because that diversity makes a hash of traditional theories. Nor can we afford to acknowledge this diversity while questioning whether the category itself has theoretical value. The *old* ideas might have little or no value—but a new formula that helps us get a grip on this sprawling category by defining its ideas and processes would have great theoretical value, for it would help us explain a complex, increasingly dynamic super-generic phenomenon.

This chapter aims for such a formula. It defines art cinema as a super-generic event with legitimate, quasi-legitimate, and illegitimate products, all of which fulfill high-art functions in cinematic cultures and subcultures. Movies often qualify for membership in this category in one of three ways. They can be made and distributed in a legitimate high-art sector such as those devoted to traditional art films or avant-garde movies; this kind of origin usually qualifies them as culturally legitimate regardless of any later acclaim or criticism. By contrast, movies that originate in less prestigious areas achieve a qualified legitimacy only through later distribution to, or recognition by, accredited audiences and

contexts. At the same time, we shouldn't forget that mainstream movies and cult movies can, through their original cultural and subcultural circulations, become art movies in their initial evaluative contexts, meaning these movies can function as high art even when confined to a subculture. In my view, all three kinds of art movie are fully contingent forms of art cinema and must be treated as such in any new theory.

Before we can understand all this, we must consider what a super-genre is and how genres are used, practically. We must also review what a canon is and how canonization works, for these historical processes occur not just in legitimate areas but in mainstream areas and cult areas. But the first thing that we must do is review how philosophers of art struggled over the second half of the twentieth century to formulate contextual definitions of "art" that were both neutral and appropriately inclusive.

### What Film Theory Should Learn from the Philosophy of Art

One model for developing a contextual definition of art cinema that is at once neutral and inclusive is found in what may seem an unlikely place: the philosophy of art. The philosophy of art, or "aesthetics," is a conservative field that insists on a rigorous method that prizes clarity and logic over poststructural concerns like the position of the subject. However we feel about the politics of this method, though, we can hardly fault its outcomes, which have often been radical. Consider that aesthetics was distancing itself from aestheticist ideas of art at the same moment that a swath of moviegoers in Europe and the U.S. were embracing an aestheticist idea of cinema for the first time. Long before *Screen* theory dismantled auteurism, aesthetics had given philosophers the equipment to see through the rhetoric enmeshing the most ideology-heavy genres. Indeed, this value-

neutral approach has even led aestheticians to create increasingly catholic theories that can accommodate popular forms of art, including porn.

Anglo-American aesthetics has been moving in this direction since at least 1956. That was the year Morris Weitz published “The Role of Theory in Aesthetics,” a neo-Wittgensteinian article that contended that the term “art” is too variable to be defined through an evaluative idea of form. “If we actually look and see what it is that we call ‘art,’” Weitz insisted, we will “find no common properties—only strands of similarities.” Theorists can arbitrarily “close the concept,” but this “forecloses the very conditions of creativity in the arts.”<sup>55</sup> This article made Weitz a leader in the field, a mantle that George Dickie later tested by questioning the central assumption of Weitz’s “open concept” approach: that we cannot define art. Dickie’s argument was in its own way as simple and as elegant as Weitz’s. Though we can’t define art through its textual forms, Dickie said, we can define it through its contextual institutions. The interventions of Weitz and Dickie gave rise to spirited objections, of course, but their value-neutral approach and insistence on history remain crucial. Today, few aestheticians use “art” as an honorific and fewer define it through particular forms. In aesthetics, popular movie genres like westerns are now enshrined as “art proper.” Noël Carroll has systematically critiqued ahistorical ideas of art and identifies all low art, including pornographic cinema, as art proper, all while still distinguishing between high and low forms of art.<sup>56</sup>

To combat these encroaching heresies against traditionalism, Monroe Beardsley in the 1960s and 1970s created an elaborate “functionalist” account of art, which defines “‘art’ in terms of what is taken to be art’s essential function or functions.”<sup>57</sup> Beardsley thought the point of art was that it rewards disinterested contemplation, or “the aesthetic

attitude,” with aesthetic feeling. He defined an artwork “as an intentional arrangement of conditions for affording experiences with marked aesthetic character.”<sup>58</sup> A theory like Beardsley’s is classificatory but not neutral. For philosophers like Beardsley, “the act of classification is itself evaluative,” for only works that reward the aesthetic attitude will “qualify as art. There is a threshold of merit, where merit is measured in terms of the efficiency of a piece in promoting the point of art, which a work must meet before it qualifies as an artwork.”<sup>59</sup> Such a theory discredits works that do not spawn true *aesthesis* and disenfranchises entire genres linked to impure “interested” forms of experience such as sexual arousal. Indeed, pornography has often been excluded from the sphere of art in very similar terms.<sup>60</sup> It is no wonder, then, that Dickie made a name for himself not only through his work on the institutional theory of art but through his sustained critique of the neo-Kantian idea of disinterest.<sup>61</sup> By attacking this unifying idea, Dickie demolished the foundation of Beardsley’s entire philosophy of art.<sup>62</sup>

One reason that the old accounts of art were so seductive, however, is that they provided theorists with a useful tool for identifying art. Neither Weitz’s approach nor Dickie’s approach offered a similar tool. Later philosophers such as Carroll and Jerrold Levinson, neither of whom wanted to return to the evident mistakes of functionalist or formalist thought but who *did* want to find a practical tool of art identification, sought to correct this clear deficiency.<sup>63</sup> For instance, like Weitz, Carroll doubted that art operates according to necessary-and-sufficient conditions, so he decided that what was most useful was a method for distinguishing art from non-art. But unlike Weitz, Carroll was dubious of open-concept methods, which seemed to reduce everything to art. Instead, he offered his historical approach or “narrativism,” which counted any work as art so long as a true

account of that work's descent from previous works of art could be established.<sup>64</sup> Though Carroll's account was not as open as Dickie's institutionalism, it was still so neutral and inclusive that it accommodated the most illegitimate forms.<sup>65</sup>

Whether or not Carroll's account is compatible with Dickie's theory is a matter of debate.<sup>66</sup> But such debate is irrelevant here. What matters most to us is that Weitz pointed out the impossibility of defining art through its forms; that Dickie pointed out that it was possible to define art in an inclusive way through its institutional contexts; and that Carroll offered a neutral, historical tool for identifying individual works as art. Along the way, one of the last great evaluative theories of art was demolished and dismissed, along with the "aesthetic attitude" on which it hinged. As it happens, all four of these notions—especially Carroll's method of identification—will be useful to us as we critique the difference between traditional, evaluative uses of "art cinema" and untraditional, neutral uses of the term, which emphasize context and inclusiveness.

### Genre and the Art-Cinema Definition

Clearly, the development of a new contextual definition of "art" in the philosophy of art is pertinent to this chapter. It shows how the cross-cultural impulse to create high art cast doubt on the attempts of philosophers before Weitz to define art only in terms of forms acclaimed by the cultural authorities. This is applicable to our discussion in that a similarly universal aspiration to make art cinema has also cast doubt on the definitions of authorities who, on the one hand, have construed art cinema in terms of preferred movements and preferred forms, or those who, on the other, have construed it in terms of culturally legitimate modes of exhibition.<sup>67</sup> But the art-philosophy problem and the film-theory problems were not identical. Philosophers who favored traditional theories of art

in the twentieth century defined art in terms of ideas that they thought would best cover the forms that deserved the *honorific* term “art,” so they were using evaluative methods to define *high* art, not *all* art. But the problem for them was twofold: high art cannot be defined in terms of form *and* not all art aspires to high-art status. The second part of this problem is not a problem in a high-art area like art cinema. As this entire book indicates, art-cinema participants have typically had an interest in high-art status. But the aspiration to make or witness high art can lead to distinct outcomes and distinct attitudes depending on where one is. If cult or mainstream auteurs make art movies in illegitimate or quasi-legitimate subcultures, whatever status they achieve will be qualified in the culture by the socio-aesthetic concerns that qualify those sectors. This is not to say such status is unreal. It just isn’t dominant or traditional. That is why art cinema is best defined as an unfolding cinematic high-art event that, at the level of actual movies, refers to a super-genre that is comprised of (all) traditional art films, (all) avant-garde movies, *plus* (all) the movies that have gained a qualified high-art status by untraditional means.

Is this a reasonable way to define a film category, especially at the level of form? I think it is. It makes sense of a network of generic usages, including those that occur in very debased contexts. But it never neglects the fact that those usages are differentiated according to relative cultural privilege or that hierarchical forces have governed this film category even in debased contexts. This definition also recognizes that scholars are not in control of genre usage. Whether we decide a movie category exists or not is irrelevant to such usage. Instead, as Steve Neale, Rick Altman, and Mark Jancovich indicate, movie categories grow on their own according to how they are used by masses of participants. Genres—including super-genres—are provisional realities that people call into being as

necessary, which means they are, as Tudor puts it, “what we collectively believe [them] to be.”<sup>68</sup> These categories only exist if their participants continue to call them into being. That is why some categories have proved so fragile, and it is why other categories have changed so rapidly. What scholars can control, though, is whether their use of such terms reflects the provisional, collective nature of genre usage.

What we should probably avoid, however, is using genre terms as if genres were transparent or fixed. And we should probably avoid acting as if our use of a genre term matches in some perfect, text-specific way the movie group that someone else invokes when he or she uses the same term. Our ideas of movie genres are far too sprawling and elliptical to correlate this way. Of course, it is only practical for mainstream critics and for lay viewers to ignore this sort of radical contingency. After all, one function of genre is to create a “discourse of total order,” as Stephen Owen says. Though scholars should recall that this illusion is always resisted by the hybridity of actual texts and contexts, mainstream critics and lay audiences have more leeway, I think, to use genre terms as “cognitive crutches” that get them where they are trying to go.<sup>69</sup> Thus, whereas one film reviewer might prefer to call Jane Campion’s *In The Cut* (2003) a work of art cinema and apply that term reasonably, another reviewer might need to see that film as a variety of woman’s film or a feminist film or an erotic thriller—or as a work of neo-*noir* or softcore or “art horror”—and apply any of those labels reasonably.<sup>70</sup> But in our scholarly roles, film theorists have in my view a different standard of truth to live up to. Thus, we should try to acknowledge the radical contingency of genre usage and organize our theorization of particular movie categories according to that knowledge.

This standard of truth places a heavy burden on those theorists who specialize in art cinema, which is uniquely slippery. Art movies do not mandate particular contents, as westerns, musicals, and sci-fi films do. Nor do art movies elicit particular bodily effects, as comedies, horror films, and thrillers do (though advocates of the “aesthetic attitude” might feel differently). What is more, even in legitimate art cinemas, there is too much diversity for us to imagine that we can define this category by way of form alone. (Must an Iranian festival film resemble an American indie art film in any significant respect?) Further accenting the slipperiness of “art cinema” is the tendency of art-cinema insiders to promote art cinema as an “anti-genre,” as if some unbridgeable, ahistorical gap separated “mere” genre movies produced in industrialized sectors like Hollywood from movies praised as auteur works. And there is the additional problem of value, whether we construe it as artistic or cultural or political. Thus, art cinema is valued culturally as an esteemed category; it may also be valued individually as a set of favorite works, making it possible to treat “art cinema” as one’s personal canon. Whether this category is purely subjective or fairly objective is, then, of paramount interest.

These problems may be resolved by switching from form-based definitions of art cinema to context-based definitions of the same. If we treat art cinema as a super-genre like mainstream cinema or cult cinema, we can retain all the elasticity apparent in the historical usage of this term while admitting that art movies are defined as such not by their form or by their “intrinsic value” but by value-oriented human traditions that work collectively. A context-based definition of art cinema also allows us to see that the notion of art cinema as an anti-genre distanced from all genre vehicles is itself an oppositional, value-generating illusion traditional to auteur promotion.

Within such an illusion, the auteur work is the opposite of the genre movie. This assumption was molded in part by the efforts of the early auteur critics to distinguish art cinema from genre cinema,<sup>71</sup> and it has been a staple of new-wave discourse since that time. (For instance, Lars von Trier and Thomas Vinterberg integrated this belief into their 1995 Dogme manifesto through their eighth “vow of chastity” [“Genre movies are not acceptable”].<sup>72</sup>) This belief system elevates certain techniques, styles, narrative arcs, and directors over techniques, styles, narrative arcs, and directors that may be presented as “polluted” by commerce. Hence, as Linda Ruth Williams shows in *The Erotic Thriller in Contemporary Cinema* (2005), promoters of art movies that have affiliations with more plainly commercial genres often stress their art-cinema affiliations when speaking within art-cinema contexts, as if art cinema were a place of refuge from genre affiliations and their low status. Such rhetoric reinforces auteur prestige, for it sees the auteur as a priest, transubstantiating the dross of commerce into Art. Williams is quite right to overrule this kind of rhetoric by noting that an art movie does not in this exchange become “*only* an auteur work”; it may still function as “a genre work.”<sup>73</sup>

The contempt for genre visible in this anti-genre conceit has ample precedent in other arts. As Altman has noted, the nineteenth-century romantics were anti-genre, for “romantic inspiration was based on the breaking down of all generic differences.”<sup>74</sup> The romantics tied their argument to debates surrounding the canon, so it is no wonder that the nineteenth-century artists who most wanted in on those debates, novelists, deflected their cultural abjection onto “genre fictions.” This process continued into the twentieth century, when novelists like Nabokov and Gilbert Sorrentino described their art as an ethereal magic, a “negative discourse,” rather than a hands-on narrative craft that they

had mastered over decades.<sup>75</sup> As aesthetes, it was second nature to them to deny that they were working in a commercial genre or any genre at all.

Despite this, the idea that art cinema is an anti-genre is illogical. Genre usage is supple, plastic, and inescapable. Even if we were to differentiate auteur cinemas from “genre cinemas” along high-art lines, we would arguably be left with a high-art genre. What’s more, auteur critics have not been that deeply invested in escaping genre. For example, in their critical capacities, Rivette, Jean-Luc Godard, and Claude Chabrol may have spoken ill of genre, but they spoke well of it at other times and were influential in their elevation of many popular Hollywood genres. (Here I am putting aside the fact that, in their directorial capacities, auteurs like Chabrol in particular made films that were both auteur vehicles *and* genre vehicles.) Another problem is the fact that the anti-genre idea has not been limited to insiders in legitimate art-cinema formats such as the art film or the avant-garde film. Indeed, this idea has likewise been lauded in some of the most debased exploitation subgenres, like horror, hardcore, and softcore.<sup>76</sup>

What we should perceive in this antipathy for genre is not a truth-oriented idea of the cinema but rather humanity’s respect for social status, a respect that offers cultural advantages. This antipathy for genre also represents a way in which high-art status has been propagated through art cinema’s subcultures, often binding illegitimate and quasi-legitimate art cinemas to legitimate ones. (Indeed, one irony of thinking of art cinema as an anti-genre is that this concept is actually a source of unity across art cinema’s dizzying subcultural complexity—meaning that it can help us discern a high-status *super-genre* in all that cinematic complexity.) Consequently, if we accent the issue of status by thinking

carefully about canon, we can create a theory of art cinema that is inclusive and neutral even as it acknowledges art cinema's differential hierarchies.

### Canon, High Art, and Cult Cinema

In the arts, a canon is often defined as a group of distinguished artists or a group of masterpieces in a genre or medium.<sup>77</sup> In common usage, this canon is thought to be fixed in time as a list of great artists or works that the culture has in a sense collectively agreed to through its mediating institutions. But such a canon actually reflects thinking that has taken place throughout a culture. It changes over time and is never identical from one person to the next. In a sense, the concept of high art functions as a canonical super-genre of the arts. In this canon, we place super-privileged formats like classical music, ballet, modernist poetry, abstract painting, etc. Though this type of canon also has the illusion of permanence to it, it too changes over time—and I doubt many people, experts included, would agree on its exact constitution. For example, the fact that jazz is a form whose populist roots are recent and obvious argues against its inclusion in high art. Still, the art jazz of virtuosos such as Ornette Coleman has much in common with modernist painting and poetry. Arguments have been made, then, for including jazz in the pantheon of high art. Though such arguments rarely catch on quickly, they become entrenched over time as long as the candidate form remains a living one.

My theory of art cinema borrows from both senses of “canon.” Here, art cinema is comprised of certain institutional formats that have been so successful over time that they now bestow high-art status on all their members, regardless of individual achievements. The traditional art film is this sort of legitimate format; so is the avant-garde movie and, in a sense that falls outside this book, video art. Beyond these legitimate forms are others

that have never succeeded in legitimating themselves at the cultural level but that *contain* a shifting canon of “masterworks” loosely agreed on by their institutions and participants. These works, whether they represent “art porn” or “art horror,” exemplify local ideas of high art as put forth by each new subculture. Some of these subcultural exemplars later secure a measure of acceptance in legitimate spheres, but most never do; and in any case, their status remains qualified pending the acceptance of their original areas as legitimate by the wider culture. Speaking formally, then, “art cinema” refers to a dynamic, high-art super-genre that is made up of legitimate art cinemas and of the culturally qualified high-art canons of quasi-legitimate and illegitimate genres.<sup>78</sup>

To my knowledge, no one has articulated this understanding of art cinema before. It is not in accord with elitist ideas of art, nor is it in accord with the populist insistence on canonical fixity—nor, again, is it in keeping with neo-formalist historians who would ignore sociological function in calling only the most successful art cinemas “art cinema.” But I bet the assumptions of this understanding are reflected to varying degrees in almost all of our tastes, given that our personal canons gather works from illegitimate genres and from illegitimate institutions as those canons grow in depth and breadth. Thus, it stands to reason that neutral theorists uninterested in defining art cinema in ways that validate their own tastes would include in this category art movies acclaimed as such in illegitimate and quasi-legitimate subcultures alike, regardless of how they felt about them, just as many of us would include every Italian neorealist art film in art cinema regardless of whether we did or did not like this or that example of the movement.

Given that this approach locates art cinema in every movie hierarchy, from Italy, Germany, and France to Hollywood, Bollywood, and Nollywood, it may seem upsetting.

But before dismissing this approach, consider these points: the hierarchies that American cinephiles once made of the films of Ingmar Bergman, François Truffaut, and Federico Fellini are not essentially different from those that the French auteur critics, including Truffaut, once made of the films of Howard Hawks, John Ford, Nicholas Ray, and Alfred Hitchcock. The French popularized a craze for making lists of favorite movies without placing too much emphasis on high-low distinctions. This practice of making personal canons was imported to America through prestigious critics like Sarris, and it is now widespread in our culture. Two egalitarian assumptions were built into this practice: first, everyone is a potential cinephile, meaning that we all have the right to make a list, or canon, of our favorite films; and second, the films we put on these lists may be taken from anywhere, including Hollywood. (Hence the mid-century scandal at the prospect of building a “cult” mystique around the films of a Hawks or a Ford.) This hierarchical list-making, the bedrock of canonization, was built into the practices of influential cultural institutions like the Anthology Film Archives and those of influential critics like Sarris, Rosenbaum, and Fred Camper; but it was also mimicked at the grassroots level by lay audiences who, more or less, shared their tastes in auteurs and in “auteur works.” But as the decades passed, these practices were also mimicked by cult institutions, cult critics, and cult audiences whose reverse elitism was embodied through low tastes that fetishized downscale exploitation movies, including pornography.<sup>79</sup>

The term “reverse elitism” comes from Sconce’s famous *Screen* article, “‘Trashing’ the Academy” (1995), which demonstrated that cult cinema is regulated by hierarchical practices borrowed from high culture. Cult cinephiles form distinctive groups, gathering subcultural capital through their knowledge of particular kinds of cult cinema, with the

subcultures devoted to those cinemas in turn arranged in hierarchies that bottom out in the world of adult film. If there is a canon of high art, then, there is also a canon of low art. Inside these subcultures, specialized promoters, critics, institutions, and audiences make lists of their favorite movies and directors, regardless of their negligible cultural status. Thus we find many of the same canonical assumptions at b-independent.com and at Bloody Disgusting that we may find at the Anthology Film Archives and the Criterion Collection. Some of the canons that form through these subcultural processes accent the high-art potentials of each subculture, working to differentiate “auteur works” in these subcultures from the “genre vehicles” that dominate them.

Clearly, these processes don’t happen only in the U.S. But they only happen in this byzantine fashion in highly developed countries such as the U.S., which has long had a sophisticated system of movie distribution. Distribution is important because it is one of the central ways in which movies, genres, and auteurs are legitimated and canonized. The only legitimate channels in art cinema are those that lead through culturally sanctioned institutions, including the global film-festival circuit as well as the system of art houses, university theaters, repertory theaters, and museums that exhibit the art movies that win distribution deals through their exposure on the festival circuit. New cult-art cinemas, by contrast, often emerge through cult festivals, cult theaters, mainstream theaters, repertory theaters, and the many forms of non-theatrical distribution that offer exploitation films low-prestige outlets. The generic specialties of a film’s production and distribution labels are also important here, as are the forms and the styles on display within individual films. But, in general, if a world cinema comes to the U.S. after having been exhibited on the festival circuit, it will be considered an art film, whereas if a world cinema is circulated in

the U.S. through a cult distribution label or after being reviewed by cult critics or cult forums, it will be regarded as foreign exploitation schlock.

Strategic and non-strategic mixing can occur in this scenario, of course, leading to changes in tastes and in canons over time. Cult art movies and entire cult genres can gain status through the attention of elite critics and elite institutions. An example of this may be found in the recent issue of *Sight & Sound* whose blurb for the cover story “The Mad, the Bad and the Dangerous: 50 Visionary Film-Makers” cites two cult filmmakers (Dario Argento and Alejandro Jodorowsky) and three establishment auteurs (Catherine Breillat, Werner Herzog, and David Lynch).<sup>80</sup> *Sight & Sound* is a major art-cinema forum with a decidedly genteel interest in transgression, so the fact that Argento and Jodorowsky are on the cover beside three recognized auteurs indicates that their reputations had by 2009 been nearly legitimated. But not completely. For example, Argento’s reputation will, I think, remain qualified by his background in the *giallo* and in horror until those genres come to be seen as fully legitimate sites for auteur work. This legitimation is now in process through the success that horror movies like the Bergmanesque vampire movie *Let the Right One In* (2008) have achieved with legitimate critics like *Sight & Sound*’s Mark Kermode.<sup>81</sup> Even more crucial is the success of the films of South Korean director Park Chan-wook, a virtuoso of horror, gore, and other genre effects, at festivals like Cannes. But crucial obstacles remain in place. As Joan Hawkins suggests in a recent *Jump Cut* article, Park’s movies have been popular with audiences and critics in the U.S., but they have encountered significant blowback from influential mainstream critics like Manohla Dargis of the *New York Times*, who regretted Cannes’ elevation of “an *arty* exploitation flick” like *Oldboy* (2003).<sup>82</sup> What Dargis’s comment suggests is that the anti-

horror bias traditional to “art-house taste” is still somewhat intact; legitimate art cinema is not yet as open to distinguished horror films as it is to distinguished dramas and romances and even comedies. But it almost is. The fact that “auteur horror” is now distributed as art cinema in American theaters after having been feted by the most prestigious European festivals indicates that our received ideas of legitimacy are continually being updated, just as they were after the arrival of Truffaut, Chabrol, Godard, *et al.*

I suppose that the main argument against the approach mapped out in this chapter is that it is destabilizing, leveling value. After all, this sort of charge has long been leveled against the postmodern theories that took root in film studies after auteurism experienced its temporary fall from grace. Hence, Geoffrey Nowell-Smith argues that the anti-elitist thrust of contemporary theory has raised impediments to

a proper understanding of cinema. First, a canon continues to exist—but by default and determined more by the vagaries of fashion and the accidents of availability than by any form of reasoned argument. Secondly, in default of such argument the idea of the importance of cinema itself is undermined. If any film can be as important as any other, and if quasi-historical or idiosyncratically personal judgements take the place of aesthetic reasoning, it is open to anyone to challenge the purpose of taking films seriously in the first place.<sup>83</sup>

But it is imprecise, I think, to say that *a* canon exists. Canons exist—for different ideas of the canon co-exist and compete—and have always done so in accord with fashion and accident and never simply in accord with “reasoned argument.” It is also not quite right to think that cinema has some ahistorical importance that obliges us to treat it “seriously.” In my view, scholars are not at their best when they act as taste-makers. Rather, they are at their best when they are somewhat detached, telling us what is going on and how that relates to what has gone on in the past—when they tell us what a canon has been *thought*

*to be* by actual groups and institutions rather than when they tell us what it *ought* to be. Otherwise, these commentators would seem to be promoting an aestheticist agenda, in effect playing a game that they would do better explaining.

My point in formulating a new definition of “art cinema” is to explain the game. In order to analyze the genre clearly, I have neither embraced nor denounced any form, cinephilia, or exhibition. But I do not want to level values; rather, I want to observe the interdependence of as many different values as possible. I want to explain how these values relate and how the contexts that have created them have evolved. I have over time concluded that these values relate through status. Theorists have often relied on formalist definitions of the genre that focus on specific styles and motifs. And they have sometimes relied on contextual definitions that have focused on exhibition sites, new waves, or audience effects. But what has unified these definitions is their effort to define art cinema in a way that credits the cinema’s high-art potential. In my definition, I have prioritized this commonality, making it central to my contextual definition.

On the other hand, to settle on an extended definition of art cinema is not to endorse the evaluative, exclusivist meaning at the heart of “art cinema.” Rather, it is to improve on philosopher Ted Cohen by noting that in the arts the high-low distinction is not only indefensible *and* indispensable but *also* inescapable,<sup>84</sup> because this distinction is found in some form across the many subcultures devoted to art and art-making. We must learn to incorporate this almost universal emphasis on high art into our definitions. Ultimately, it makes little sense for us to endorse certain forms, subgenres, outlets, and canons so as to sustain the seriousness of film study, for such a habit transforms us from analysts of aesthetic value into critics and evaluators, makers of value. And that, I believe, is to step away from an academic approach that is defensibly “serious.”

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## NOTES TO CHAPTER ONE

Ed Young, *Seven Blind Mice* (New York: Philomel, 1992), n.p.

<sup>3</sup> As Michael Z. Newman puts it, “mainstream” is “a category that niche cultures or subcultures construct to have something against which to define themselves and generate their cultural or subcultural capital. I do not believe that there is a mainstream that exists independent of this process of classification.” Michael Z. Newman, *Indie: An American Film Culture* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2011), p. 5. See also Mark Jancovich, *et al.*, “Introduction,” *Defining Cult Movies*, ed. Jancovich, *et al.* (Manchester: University of Manchester Press, 2003), pp. 1-2.

<sup>4</sup> This art-cinema hierarchy is obvious in new studies, like Tino Balio’s *The Foreign Film Renaissance on American Screens, 1946-1973* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 2010) as well as in older ones, like David Bordwell’s *Narration in the Fiction Film* (1985; Londong: Routledge, 2008). As a result, even savvy treatments like Newman’s book *Indie* hesitate to refer to American cinemas—including indie and indie-style films from Miramax, New Line, and Sony Pictures Classics—as “actual” art cinemas, though they recognize that these cinemas fill art-cinema functions. See Newman, *Indie*, p. 76.

<sup>5</sup> For example, film scholar Mike Budd has shown that in the U.S. some of the earliest ideas of art cinema arose through the oppositional value assigned through institutional processes to imports like Robert Wiene’s *Des cabinet des Dr. Caligari* (1919). Mike Budd, “The National Board of Review and Early Art Cinema in New York: *The Cabinet of Dr. Caligari* as Affirmative Culture,” *Cinema Journal*, vol. 26, no. 1 (Autumn 1986): pp. 3-18.

<sup>6</sup> For a standard account, see Peter Lev, *The Euro-American Cinema* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1993), pp. 7-8.

<sup>7</sup> Edward Slingerland, “Two Worlds: The Ghost and the Machine” (2008), *Evolution, Literature, and Film: A Reader*, ed. Brian Boyd, Joseph Carroll, and Jonathan Gottschall” (New York: Columbia University Press, 2010), p. 223.

<sup>8</sup> See Lawrence Levine’s *Highbrow/Lowbrow: The Emergence of Cultural Hierarchy in America* (1989; Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1990) and Larry Shiner’s *The Invention of Art* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2001).

<sup>9</sup> Robert Sklar, *Movie-Made America: A Cultural History of American Movies* (New York: Vintage, 1975), pp. 18-19.

<sup>10</sup> A.L. Rees, *A History of Experimental Film and Video*, p. 30; see pp. 30-33. See also András Bálint Kovács, *Screening Modernism: European Art Cinema, 1950-1980* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2007), pp. 16-32; Dudley Andrew, *Film in the Aura of Art* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1984), pp. 3-10, and Dudley Andrew, "Foreword," *Global Art Cinema: New Theories and Histories*, ed. Rosalind Galt and Karl Schoonover (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010), p. v; Philip Rosen, "Notes on Art Cinema and the Emergence of Sub-Saharan Film," *Global Art Cinema: New Theories and Histories*, ed. Rosalind Galt and Karl Schoonover (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010), p. 252; and Dominique Russell, "Introduction: Why Rape?," *Rape in Art Cinema*, ed. Dominique Russell (New York: Continuum, 2010), pp. 3-4. As Baumann notes, art cinema was before the Second World War an avant-garde concept, as defined through its distribution through experimental movies and avant-garde magazines, both of which tended to have restricted circulations. Baumann, *Hollywood Highbrow*, p. 115. See also Richard Abel, "French Silent Cinema," *The Oxford History of World Cinema*, ed. Geoffrey Nowell-Smith (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996), pp. 112-116.

<sup>11</sup> For example, see Tino Balio, *Foreign Film Renaissance*, p. 25.

<sup>12</sup> As Kovács notes, the "origins of the concept of the 'art film' as an institutional form of cinema can be traced back to the late 1910s." Kovács, *Screening Modernism*, p. 22; see pp. 22-27.

<sup>13</sup> We should remember, though, that this was not the auteur-oriented Academy system of today. Even directors who won Academy Awards in the Hollywood of the time only rarely thought of themselves as film artists. For more, see Shyon Baumann, *Hollywood Highbrow: From Entertainment to Art* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2007), pp. 55-56, pp. 60-64.

<sup>14</sup> See Eric Schaefer, "*Bold! Daring! Shocking! True!*": *A History of Exploitation Films, 1919-1959* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1999), pp. 331-337.

<sup>15</sup> There are three excellent books that chronicle these developments, all of which have been noted above: Barbara Wilinsky's *Sure Seaters: The Emergence of Art House Cinema* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2001), Haidee Wasson's *Museum Movies: The Museum of Modern Art and the Birth of Art Cinema* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2005), and Balio's *The Foreign Film Renaissance on American Screens, 1946-1973* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 2010).

<sup>16</sup> Sex is rarely the focus of most studies of this high-status genre. Thus Balio's book, which is very clear in articulating the role that "sex appeal" played in the popularization of art films during the postwar period, is a great recent addition to the scholarship. See Balio, *Foreign Film Renaissance*, p. 8.

<sup>17</sup> The term is Baumann's. See Baumann, *Hollywood Highbrow*, pp. 21-52.

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 127-8.

<sup>19</sup> For example, see Schaefer, "*Bold! Daring!*", p. 331, and Lewis, *Hollywood v. Hardcore*, p. 145.

<sup>20</sup> Baumann, *Hollywood Highbrow*, p. 22.

<sup>21</sup> The evidence for this is legion. See, for example, Rick Altman, *Film/Genre* (London: BFI, 1999), p. 127.

<sup>22</sup> See Robert Allen and Douglas Gomery, *Film History: Theory and Practice* (New York: Knopf, 1985), p. 71, and Carroll, *Theorizing the Moving Image*, pp. 1-4.

<sup>23</sup> Michael Zryd has written two pieces on this subject. See Michael Zryd, "The Academy and the Avant-Garde: A Relationship of Dependence and Resistance," *Cinema Journal*, vol. 45, no. 2 (Winter 2006), pp. 17-42; and Michael Zryd, "Experimental Film and the Development of Film Study in America," *Inventing Film Studies*, ed. Lee Grieveson and Haidee Wasson (Durham: Duke University Press, 2008), pp. 182-216.

<sup>24</sup> Andrew Sarris, "Why the Foreign Film Has Lost Its Cachet," *New York Times*, May 2, 1999: 1 p. Available at <<http://www.nytimes.com/1999/05/02/movies/summer-films-international-why-the-foreign-film-has-lost-its-cachet.html>>. Accessed January 6, 2011. See Balio, *Foreign Film Renaissance*, p. 249.

<sup>25</sup> See Tino Balio, "'A Major Presence in all of the World's Important Markets': The Globalization of Hollywood in the 1990s," *Contemporary Hollywood Cinema*, ed. Steve Neale and Murray Smith (London: Routledge, 1998), pp. 64-67. On indie cinema, see Michael Z. Newman, *Indie: An American Film Culture* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2011).

<sup>26</sup> See Justin Wyatt, "The Formation of the 'Major Independent': Miramax, New Line and the New Hollywood," *Contemporary Hollywood Cinema*, ed. Steve Neale and Murray Smith (London: Routledge, 1998), pp. 76-84. See also Michael Z. Newman, *Indie: An American Film Culture* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2011).

<sup>27</sup> Two peer-reviewed portfolios include Jonathan Buchsbaum and Elena Gorfinkel, eds., "Cinephilia Dossier: What is Being Fought For by Today's Cinephilia(s)," *Framework* 50.1-2 (Spring/Fall 2009), pp. 176-228, and Mark Betz, ed., "In Focus: Cinephilia," *Cinema Journal* 49.2 (Winter 2010), pp. 130-178. See also Jonathan Rosenbaum and Adrian Martin, eds., *Movie Mutations: The Changing Face of World Cinephilia* (London: BFI, 2003), and Marijke de Valck and Malte Hagener, eds., *Cinephilia: Movies, Love and Memory* (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2005).

<sup>28</sup> *Hollywood Highbrow* fails to distinguish high-art ideas from broader ideas of art, which at times makes it difficult to understand what Hollywood's consecration as "art" actually meant. Baumann's book also fails to consider Hollywood's current production of art movies through its indie-style "boutique" divisions and ignores subcultural manifestations of the art-cinema impulse; nor does it consider the implications of biocultural ideas. On the whole, though, these critiques are piddling when the insights offered by this book—which should be on every film scholar's shelf—are taken into account.

<sup>29</sup> Shyon Baumann, *Hollywood Highbrow: From Entertainment to Art* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2007), pp. 14-18.

<sup>30</sup> Besides *Defining Cult Movies*, edited by Jancovich (*et al.*), see Ernest Mathijs and Xavier Mendik's collection *The Cult Film Reader* (New York: Open University Press, 2008).

## <sup>31</sup>NOTES TO CHAPTER TWO

<sup>1</sup> Steve Neale, "Art Cinema as Institution," *Screen*, vol. 22, no. 1 (Spring 1981), p. 13.

<sup>32</sup> Eleftheria Thanouli, "'Art Cinema' Narration: Breaking Down a Wayward Paradigm," *Scope* no. 14 (June 2009), p. 1. <<http://www.scope.nottingham.ac.uk/issue.php?issue=14>>. Accessed June 21, 2009.

<sup>33</sup> Andrew Tudor, "The Rise and Fall of the Art (House) Movie," *The Sociology of Art: Ways of Seeing*, ed. David Inglis and John Hughson (London: Basingstoke, 2005), p. 125.

<sup>34</sup> Though they have indeed led there. For convincing demonstrations that the movies are an art form, see Noël Carroll, *Theorizing the Moving Image* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996).

<sup>35</sup> Tudor, "Rise and Fall," p. 125.

<sup>36</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 138.

<sup>37</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>38</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>39</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>40</sup> See, among many possible examples, Mark Betz, "Art, Exploitation, Underground," *Defining Cult Movies*, ed. Mark Jancovich, *et al.* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2003), pp. 202-222, and Joan Hawkins, "Culture Wars: Some New Trends in Art Horror," *Jump Cut*, no. 51 (Spring 2009), pp. 2-3. Available at <<http://www.ejumpcut.org/currentissue/artHorror/index.html>>. Accessed, June 18, 2009.

<sup>41</sup> Diane Negra calls these complexes "art-house miniplexes" or "art miniplexes." For a description of this kind of outlet, see Diane Negra, "'Queen of the Indies': Parker Posey's Niche Stardom and the Taste Cultures of Independent Film," *Contemporary American Independent Film*, ed. Chris Holmlund and Justin

Wyatt (London: Routledge, 2005), pp. 71-88. See also Michael Z. Newman, *Indie: An American Film Culture* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2011), pp. 77-79.

<sup>42</sup> David Bordwell, "The Art Cinema as a Mode of Film Practice" (1979), *Film Theory and Criticism: Introductory Readings*, ed. Marshall Cohen and Leo Baudry (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999), pp. 716. This claim is problematic because many movements had already been described as "art cinemas" that produced "art films." It is preferential to define a status-oriented concept with a long history in terms of a single set of movements like Italian neorealism or the French New Wave. See A.L. Rees, *A History of Experimental Film and Video*, especially pp. 30-33. See also Chapter One, note 12.

<sup>43</sup> Bordwell, "The Art Cinema," p. 717.

<sup>44</sup> Ibid. Bordwell's italics.

<sup>45</sup> See, Thanouli, "Art Cinema' Narration," pp. 1-14.

<sup>46</sup> Rosalind Galt and Karl Schoonover, "Introduction: The Impurity of Art Cinema," *Global Art Cinema: New Theories and Histories*, ed. Rosalind Galt and Karl Schoonover (New York: Oxford University Press, 2010), pp. 3, 6.

<sup>47</sup> Bordwell's article was published near the end of the New Hollywood era, when art cinema was most explicitly tied to Hollywood and when it was decidedly big business. Indeed, Bordwell even notes in his essay that an art cinema was emerging in the New Hollywood—a point he expands in *Narration in the Fiction Film* (1985). Bordwell, "The Art Cinema," p. 723; David Bordwell, *Narration in the Fiction Film* (1985; London: Routledge, 2008), pp. 231-232. But Bordwell still finds it possible to say in his article that "the art cinema is of little economic importance in the United States today." Bordwell, "The Art Cinema," p. 717. The reason for this apparent contradiction is that Bordwell does not consider Hollywood art cinema an authentic art cinema, a designation that in his view depends on a more European style of narration that is not reducible to cause-effect plotting or Hollywood genre motifs.

<sup>48</sup> And even scholars who focus on form are careful to avoid reductiveness. For example, Mark Betz has recently argued that art cinema is marked by a "parametric" tradition, a term he borrows from Bordwell to describe a modernist narrative foregrounding form and style. Betz qualifies this by noting that "parametric" narration is but "one strand of an 'international style' for contemporary world cinema, indeed contemporary art cinema"—one that has "since the late 1980s continued in Western Europe but has also proceeded in parallel in Eastern Central Europe, sub-Saharan Africa, and especially East Asia." Mark Betz, "Beyond Europe: On Parametric Transcendence," *Global Art Cinema: New Theories and Histories* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010), p. 33. Similarly, András Bálint Kovács has mapped out what he deems significant strains and styles in the genre, but he never reduces art cinema to any particular strains or styles. Thus he argues that modernism, which he equates with the commercial art cinema, is "not a particular style in the cinema; it is rather the impact of different modernist movements in the narrative art cinema, engendering different (modern) film styles." András Bálint Kovács, *Screening Modernism: European Art Cinema, 1950-1980* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2007), p. 52; Kovács's italics.

<sup>49</sup> See Geoffrey Nowell-smith, "Art Cinema," *The Oxford History of World Cinema*, ed. Geoffrey Nowell-Smith (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996), pp. 569-70, and Jeffrey Sconce, "Smart Cinema," *Contemporary American Cinema*, ed. Linda Ruth Williams and Michael Hammond (London: McGraw Hill, 2006), pp. 429-430. See also Jeffrey Sconce, "Irony, Nihilism and the New American 'Smart' Film," *Screen*, vol. 43, no. 4 (Winter 2002), pp. 350-352.

<sup>50</sup> Dominique Russell refers to the definition of "art cinema" as "nebulous" and insists that while it has been associated with "high culture, intelligence, and prestige," it is "by no means a static category, and has meant different things at different times." Dominique Russell, "Introduction: Why Rape?", *Rape in Art Cinema*, ed. Dominique Russell (New York: Continuum, 2010), p. 3.

<sup>51</sup> Jill Forbes and Sarah Street, *European Cinema: An Introduction* (New York: Palgrave, 2000), p. 40.

<sup>52</sup> Rachel Gabara, "Abderrahmane Sissako: Second and Third Cinema in the First Person," *Global Art Cinema: New Theories and Histories*, ed. Rosalind Galt and Karl Schoonover (Oxford: Oxford University

Press, 2010), p. 320; see pp. 320-321.

<sup>53</sup> Thanouli, “‘Art Cinema’ Narration,” p. 9.

<sup>54</sup> Angela Ndalanis, “Art cinema,” *The Cinema Book* (1985), ed. Pam Cook (London: British Film Institute, 2007), p. 87.

<sup>55</sup>

<sup>56</sup> Morris Weitz, “The Role of Theory in Aesthetics” (1956), *Problems in Aesthetics*, ed. Morris Weitz (1959; New York: Macmillan, 1963), pp. 151-152.

<sup>56</sup> See George Dickie, *The Art Circle* (1984; Evanston: Chicago Spectrum Press, 1997); and Noël Carroll, *A Philosophy of Mass Art* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998).

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<sup>58</sup> George Dickie, *Art and Value* (Malden: Blackwell, 2001), p. 33.

<sup>58</sup> Quoted in Dickie, *Art and Value*, p. 34.

<sup>59</sup> Stephen Davies, *Definitions of Art* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1991), p. 42.

<sup>60</sup> Indeed, this is how R.G. Collingwood, a twentieth-century functionalist, relegates the form to non-art status. See Dickie, *Art and Value*, pp. 33-34. See also R.G. Collingwood, *The Principles of Art* (1938; New York: Galaxy, 1960), pp. 84-85.

<sup>61</sup> For persuasive critiques of the neo-Kantian idea of aesthetic disinterest, see George Dickie, *Evaluating Art* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1988), pp. 15-79, and George Dickie, “The Myth of the Aesthetic Attitude,” *American Philosophical Quarterly*, vol. 1 (January 1964), pp. 56-65.

<sup>62</sup> This is as good a place as any to give a brief overview of the concept of aesthetic disinterest, an idea to which I will return fairly often. When Immanuel Kant first published his *Critique of Judgement* in 1790, the Prussian philosopher had no idea that his notion of disinterested contemplation, sketched in a section of his book that he entitled “Analytic of the Beautiful,” would be transformed into the cultural touchstone that it is today. Immanuel Kant, *Critique of Judgement* (1790), trans. James Creed Meredith (1952; Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2007), pp. 35-74. This concept, which demands a spectatorship so pure that it is indifferent to the existence of its object, resembles the auteur theory in that it has managed to re-articulate and re-package an existing human attitude in a uniquely persuasive way. See, for example, Nick Zangwill, “UnKantian Notions of Disinterest,” *The British Journal of Aesthetics*, vol. 32, no. 2 (April 1992), pp. 149-152; and Jacques Derrida, *The Truth in Painting* (1978), trans. Geoff Bennington and Ian McLeod (Chicago: University of Chicago Press), p. 43. This attitude considers any action “pure” if that action is performed for its own sake alone; such an action cannot, then, be impelled by other desires, purposes, or emotions, all of which might qualify as “ulterior” motives. When this attitude was codified through neo-Kantian ideas and applied to art, the result was a neo-Kantian aesthetic that detached art from desire, utility, and emotion, without regard for our actual cultural and physiological experiences of art—which are, as George Dickie would later argue, awash with those things. See George Dickie, “The Myth of the Aesthetic Attitude,” *American Philosophical Quarterly*, vol. 1 (January 1964), pp. 56-65. Nevertheless, this neo-Kantian aesthetic—which aestheticians like Monroe Beardsley identified with idealized forms of spectatorship, including the famous “aesthetic attitude”—gained force in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries and held sway through the middle of the twentieth century. Ironically, this ideal gained much of its significance from the fact that it was useful as a basis for art evaluation and as a rationale for enforcing modernist codes of “serious” contemplation in museums and concert halls. See Larry Shiner, *The Invention of Art: A Cultural History* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2001), pp. 144-5, 154, 218. For more, see Lawrence Levine, *Highbrow/Lowbrow: The Emergence of Cultural Hierarchy in America* (1988; Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1990). Not surprisingly, the influence of this ideal reached its peak in the U.S. in the middle of the twentieth century at the time that art houses were spreading across the country. See Barbara Wilinsky’s *Sure Seaters: The Emergence of Art House Cinema* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2001) and Haidee Wasson’s *Museum Movies: The Museum of Modern Art and the Birth of Art Cinema* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2005). But the utility of this concept didn’t stop there. As aesthetician Noël Carroll puts it, “[s]omewhere along the line” art critics made the

crucial mistake of “transferr[ing] the notion of disinterestedness from the spectator to the art object.” Noël Carroll, *A Philosophy of Mass Art* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998), p. 96. Thus, influential critics like Clement Greenberg helped transform the ideal of disinterest from a “mere” critical attitude into an influential artistic method (whereby serious modernist artists might be identified by their pure or disinterested creative methods) and a preferred modernist style (often imagined as austere and abstract, not just because abstraction was the twentieth century’s most privileged art style but also because it was easy to connect abstraction to the purity and unworldliness implicit to the concept of disinterest). Shyon Baumann has noted that “[a]rtists need to profess a degree of ‘disinterestedness’ in economic matters to enjoy credibility.” This aspect of their art-making is a large part of what makes them seem “serious.” Shyon Baumann, *Hollywood Highbrow: From Entertainment to Art* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2007), p. 168. All in all, then, this neo-Kantian idea became increasingly important throughout the art world, where it encapsulated modernist ideas of seriousness in various ways.

<sup>63</sup> Noël Carroll, *Philosophy of Art: A Contemporary Introduction* (London: Routledge, 1999), pp. 232-239.

<sup>64</sup> We could do this by identifying “auteur works” or “art films” through accepted protocols. Examples of such methods may be found at the end of my next chapter (on auteurs) or in the Sconce article in which he ties his new classification of “smart cinema” to Bordwell’s ideas of art-cinema form. See Sconce, “Smart Cinema,” p. 429. See also Dickie, *Art and Value*, p. 44. That such strategies need to be worked out at all reflects what sociologist of art Howard Becker has said about the philosophy of art’s institutional theories: though brilliant, their ideas of the art world don’t “have much meat on [their] bones.” Howard Becker, *Art Worlds* (1982; Berkeley: University of California Press, 2008), p. 149.

<sup>65</sup>

Noël Carroll, *A Philosophy of Mass Art* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998), pp. 26, 52, 56-57, 295-299.

<sup>66</sup> Dickie, *Art and Value*, p. 45; see also Davies, *Definitions of Art*, p. 169.

<sup>67</sup> Other scholars have also defined art cinema in terms of the art house. Perhaps the most famous example is Peter Lev’s half-hearted reduction, “art films are what is shown in art theaters.” Peter Lev, *The Euro-American Cinema* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1993), p. 4. See also Barbara Wilinsky, *Sure Seaters: The Emergence of Art House Cinema* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2001).

<sup>68</sup> Quoted in Robert Allen and Douglas Gomery, *Film History: Theory and Practice* (New York: Knopf, 1985), p. 85.

<sup>69</sup> Stephen Owen, “Genres in Motion,” *PMLA*, vol. 122, no. 5 (October 2007), p. 1393.

<sup>70</sup> E.g., Amy Taubin recently called *In the Cut* “one of the great art horror films.” Amy Taubin, “Horrors! On the Riviera this Year, If it Bled, It Led,” *Film Comment*, vol. 45, no. 4 (July/August 2009), p. 53.

<sup>71</sup> See, e.g., Jacques Rivette *et al.*, “Six Characters in Search of Auteurs: A Discussion about the French Cinema” (1957), *The European Cinema Reader*, ed. Catherine Fowler (London: Routledge, 2002), p. 65.

<sup>72</sup> Lars von Trier and Thomas Vinterberg, “Dogme 95—The Vow of Chastity,” *The European Cinema Reader*, p. 83.

<sup>73</sup> Linda Ruth Williams, *The Erotic Thriller in Contemporary Cinema* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2005), p. 405; see also pp. 396-406. Williams’s italics.

<sup>74</sup> Rick Altman, *Film/Genre* (London: BFI, 1999), p. 5.

<sup>75</sup> See Gilbert Sorrentino, *Something Said: Essays* (1984; Normal, IL: Dalkey Archive Press, 2001), pp. 325-330.

<sup>76</sup> Here I could cite Tony Marsiglia. On first talking to this director, I assumed that he would agree that his films were “softcore,” given that they were low-budget movies produced and promoted by a softcore label, and given that they included persistent softcore spectacle. But not only did Marsiglia *not* talk of his movies as softcore, he sometimes did not even speak of them as *art movies*, preferring the more universal category of Art. Tony Marsiglia, “RE: Some Questions,” personal e-mails to the author (September 2004), pp. 1-5. It is not difficult to compare such an attitude to that of someone like Kubrick, who once claimed that a movie

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“has no responsibility to be anything but a work of art.” Stanley Kubrick, *Stanley Kubrick: Interviews*, ed. Gene Phillips (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 2001), p. 130.

<sup>77</sup> See, e.g., Patricia Waugh, “Canon,” *A Companion to Aesthetics*, ed. David Cooper (1992; Cambridge: Blackwell, 1996), pp. 59-61. Waugh’s explanation of the canon is valuable for the emphasis it puts on the way politically minded groups, like feminists, have exposed the cultural competitions that direct canonical processes. Feminists are right about this. Still, I would argue that the exclusionary aspect of the canon has not simply limited the canon along the lines of gender, race, and sexual identity but also along the lines of taste, which may be where those processes are most confounding. It is one thing to realize that feminist critics or queer theorists can be as elitist as anyone else in advocating on behalf of marginalized female auteurs or of queer cinemas. It is another thing altogether to hear cult theorists and pop-culture scholars endorse elitist ideas in endorsing low-culture films and directors for canonization.

<sup>78</sup> Instead of focusing on the fact that genres are often thought identical to a set of formal conventions, we should focus on the fact that genres are most often inclusive. They have conventions, true, but they do not deny genre membership to movies that accommodate them as they can. *Planet of the Apes* (1968) is a sci-fi film but so is *Play-mate of the Apes* (2002), despite the fact that the latter is a low-budget softcore spoof reliant on tinfoil and red lights. This is not controversial. But what, then, should we say about *Dr. Jekyll and Mistress Hyde*, a low-budget softcore movie that draws on *Mulholland Drive*? *Mistress Hyde* aspires to be an art movie in the same way that *Play-Mate* aspires to be a sci-fi movie—but whereas we grant the latter aspiration based on a few campy props, we don’t necessarily grant the former.

<sup>79</sup> Jeffrey Sconce, “‘Trashing the academy’: Taste, Excess, and an Emerging Politics of Cinematic Style,” *Screen*, vol. 36, no. 4 (Winter 1995), p. 382.

<sup>80</sup> Mark Cousins *et al.*, “The Mad, the Bad, and the Dangerous,” *Sight & Sound*, vol. 19, issue 9 (September 2009), pp. 22-36. See cover.

<sup>81</sup> Mark Kermode, “It Is What It’s Not,” *Sight & Sound*, vol. 19, issue 5 (May 2009), pp. 34-36. This article adopts an anti-genre stance, applauding *Let the Right One In* by distinguishing it from horror movies and other genre motifs so as to situate it as art cinema. Such articles are crucial to the movie’s legitimization in part because this example of Swedish art horror has also been claimed by cult cinema through its success at cult festivals and in cult forums devoted to horror like *Fangoria* and *Rue Morgue*.

<sup>82</sup> Quoted in Hawkins, “Culture Wars,” p. 1.

<sup>83</sup> Geoffrey Nowell-Smith, “New Concepts of Cinema,” *The Oxford History of World Cinema*, ed. Geoffrey Nowell-Smith (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996), p. 759.

<sup>84</sup> See Ted Cohen, “High and Low Art, and High and Low Audiences,” *The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism*, vol. 57, no. 2 (Spring 1999), pp. 137-143.

## Chapter Three / No Start, No End: *Auteurism and the Auteur Theory*

*The attempt to move beyond auteurism has to recognize the place which auteurism occupies, and the influence which it brings to bear.*

—John Caughie, *Theories of Authorship* (1981)<sup>85</sup>

In a June 2009 letter-to-the-editor, Michel Ciment argued that *Sight & Sound*'s celebration of the French New Wave in its May 2009 issue was deceptive, for it implied that the movement was “the origin of everything” and had even “‘established the auteur as the supreme creative force.’” To be clear, as the editor of *Positif*, Ciment did not have a problem with this notion of film authorship. But he did have a problem with the notion that the New Wave had inaugurated it. In his view, Ingmar Bergman, Luchino Visconti, Robert Bresson, Jacques Tati, and Andrzej Wajda had all become “cultural heroes” years before Jean-Luc Godard, Claude Chabrol, Éric Rohmer, François Truffaut, Jacques Rivette, and Agnès Varda achieved a similar status. Indeed, as “early as the 1920s,” Ciment wrote, the director stood out as the “auteur and the central creative role. Murnau, Lang, Sjöström, Lubitsch, Chaplin, Stroheim, Sternberg, Eisenstein, DeMille, Vidor, Gance et al were lauded and commented upon lengthily.”<sup>86</sup>

Film scholars have made the same point many times. Thomas Schatz, writing in 1981, argued that anyone “who discussed ‘the Lubitsch touch’ in the ’30s or anticipated the next ‘Hitchcock thriller’ in the ’40s was, in fact, practicing this critical approach.”<sup>87</sup> There is, then, a distinction to be made between auteurism, which is an attitude toward film authorship that has been with us since the silent period, and the auteur theory. The auteur theory was a specific articulation of the auteurist attitude that was first put forth by Alexandre Astruc in 1948 and that was over the following decade refined as *la politique*

*des auteurs* by the auteur critics of *Cahiers du cinéma*.<sup>88</sup> Then, during the 1960s, Andrew Sarris translated this auteur *policy* into the auteur *theory* as it is known today to English-speaking audiences.<sup>89</sup> As scholars like John Caughie, Edward Buscombe, David Gerstner, Janet Staiger, James Naremore, Pam Cook, and Barry Keith Grant have documented, this brand of auteurism was over the next decades subjected to relentless attacks by an array of film critics, aestheticians, historians, structuralists, poststructuralists, multiculturalists, feminists, sociologists, and scientists.<sup>90</sup> Indeed, entire anthologies have been put together with the understanding that auteurism and its theory are somehow deficient. (See, e.g., Caughie's *Theories of Authorship* [1981].) But as these scholars have also shown, rather than being consigned to intellectual perdition, the theory has inevitably been "revised and revived," updated for fresh circumstances.<sup>91</sup> And insofar as they did not invent auteurism, this is what the auteur critics did as well: they retrofitted an existing attitude that was too useful and *human* to be eliminated by rational argument.

In this chapter, I revisit auteurism, thinking about its influence, its shortcomings, and its persistence. In tandem with its theory, auteurism has made many things "go," but this diverse functionality has come at a steep cost. Auteurism has turned attention away from the political, economic, collaborative, and biological contexts of the film industry, its romantic stress on the individual obscuring many realities. Still, academics should not kid themselves into thinking that this meme may be gotten rid of simply by highlighting its epistemological defects. Auteurism accesses something too basic in human nature for this to be possible. It simplifies in a way that is too convenient, too malleable. And it is now the foundation of too many institutions and investments. As scholars, we should face these facts head on. We should be aware of auteurism's shortcomings as well as its utter

stability. This dual awareness will help us recognize its best academic uses, which are in my view rarely evaluative and never celebratory. In keeping with these ideas, I defend in my finale a modest use of auteurism that extends the original auteur critics' application of the auteur theory to Hollywood directors making genre works. As it happens, auteurism's traditional signs may be used to identify art-cinema vehicles even in cult sectors, where auteurs may be identified as easily as in traditional sectors.

### Cultural Impact of the Auteur Theory

“I’m French. We respect directors in our country.”  
—*Inglourious Basterds* (Quentin Tarantino, 2009)

According to Schatz, auteurism “would not be worth bothering with if it hadn’t been so influential, effectively stalling film history and criticism in a prolonged stage of adolescent romanticism.”<sup>92</sup> If anything, Schatz underestimates auteurism’s mid-twentieth-century impact here. After all, auteurism didn’t just *stall* film history and film criticism; it re-made those fields. What is more, the formalist tendencies linked to the auteur theory lent film studies some of its most productive methods. Thus, Caughie has argued that the auteur theory encouraged scholars to attend to *mise en scène* with newfound rigor.<sup>93</sup> But auteurism has also had broader cultural effects. I agree with Caughie that scholars must come to terms with these effects, including its most significant biological, cultural, and institutional roles, if we hope to transcend its many defects.

Auteurism’s effects have, it seems, been legion. For example, during the postwar period, auteurism helped push the Sexual Revolution forward through its auteur-inspired assaults on censorship. Its theory has also been given credit for helping to consecrate film as one “of the sanctified Arts,”<sup>94</sup> spreading cinephilia through cultures and initiating new-wave movements in a host of national cinemas across several continents. And auteurism

temporarily settled a debate over film authorship. Thus, after 1970, even if a director's production status was qualified by collaboration, he or she was routinely credited as the film's "prime mover," the figure most responsible for its sights, sounds, and stories.<sup>95</sup> Two corollaries of this new production centrality were the beliefs that a personal vision could be traced across the curve of an auteur's oeuvre and, in Sarris's words, that the "best directors generally make the best films."<sup>96</sup> If these ideas had a huge effect on film studies, they also had a tremendously hierarchical effect on film production, where even in Hollywood they created a rationale for subordinating above-the-line talent as well as cast, crew, and studio to the authority of star auteurs.

What occasioned all these changes? If we examine the rag-tag manifestos and interviews most often associated with the early auteur critics and their various policies, we will begin, but *only* begin, to understand what it was about the auteur critics and their ideas that gave them such an outsize influence. These documents include "A Certain Tendency of the French Cinema" (1954), by Truffaut; "Six Characters in Search of Auteurs: A Discussion about the French Cinema" (1957), by Rivette, Rohmer, André Bazin, Jacques Doniol-Valcroze, Pierre Kast, and Roger Leenhardt; "The Face of the French Cinema Has Changed" (1959), by Godard; and "The Oberhausen Manifesto" (1962), by twenty-six German signers.<sup>97</sup> To this list of documents, we might add others, including "The First Statement of the New American Cinema Group" (1962), by Jonas Mekas and the Film-Maker's Coop, and various writings by Sarris, including "Notes on the Auteur Theory" (1962). We see in these documents the frustration of directors and critics irritated by literary traditions, economic constraints, and industrial hierarchies. Their burdens became more wearisome as the success of the French New Wave became

obvious. Hence, the insouciance of Godard, *qua* critic, claiming that “[f]ilm auteurs, thanks to us, have finally entered the history of art,” grows into the intemperance and blatant sense of entitlement later expressed by the German and American directors. Their manifestoes demanded even more freedom, calling for open, artist-based experimentation where the Godard of 1959 focused on *realistic* experimentation in the context of specific feature-film markets with their specific audiences.<sup>98</sup>

The *Cahiers* critics in particular used their auteur policy to promote their favorite directors in a way that served their personal and professional necessities. For example, in “A Certain Tendency,” Truffaut uses his conservative brand of auteurism to praise certain French directors against the French cinema’s “tradition of quality”<sup>99</sup>; by contrast, in “Six Characters,” Rivette uses *la politique des auteurs* to promote certain Hollywood directors against the same French tradition. As the auteur policy coalesced into a more dogmatic theory, it indicated in a vague way that cinema should say something personal—but it was always extremely specific about *who* should say it. In the studio organization of both classical Hollywood and the classical French cinema, the director was a supervisor, not a visionary, while the writer (or writers) might have control over what a film said and some control over its look. But the idea of authorship that impelled auteurism was a literary analogy handing the director charge of the dialogue, message, and style. For auteurists, it was crucial that directors work with writers, since the latter could rarely be supplanted altogether. Rivette makes it explicit that “the great American directors” are artists—not, as Bazin once put it, because of “the genius of the system,” but because they “work on the scenario . . . from the beginning, in collaboration with a scriptwriter,” while treating the writer as a technician akin to a gaffer.<sup>100</sup> On this basis, the *Cahiers* critics defended, as

Rivette notes, “Hitchcock rather than Wyler, and Mann rather than Zinnemann, because they are directors who actually work on their scenarios.”<sup>101</sup>

Many wrinkles were added to this broad set of prescriptions. Some auteur critics, like Sarris, worked out complex systems, often making the question of which Hollywood directors qualified as “true” auteurs a matter of complex and subjective formal criteria.<sup>102</sup> Prominent critics like Jonathan Rosenbaum reduced this question to a straightforward evaluation of an *oeuvre* as documented in a list of “essential” films.<sup>103</sup> But the basic fact that many Americans took away from this deepening taste warfare was that the French had accepted Hollywood directors of genre vehicles—including westerns, comedies, and musicals—as serious artists. This was an earth-shattering development, for Americans had not been trained to take their own cinemas seriously but *had* been trained to take the aesthetic declarations of French critics seriously. Of course, the French context, bound as it was to specific conditions of labor, was lost in translation. And what has never been adequately considered is that it is the job of mainstream movie critics to evaluate movies, lauding some while denigrating others—which is one practical description of what the *Cahiers* critics were up to, despite all the breath and ferment. What enabled them to do all this so effectively was the accessibility of *la politique des auteurs*, which was adaptable to so many situations that it could be exported to markets where it could thrive not just on its merits but on the cultural credentials it gained in passage.

### Problems with the Auteur Theory

Again, part of what made this brand of auteurism so successful was its generality, which made it uniquely portable. But this ahistorical quality also made auteurism divisive from the start.<sup>104</sup> Indeed, what has been called “the auteur theory” in Anglo-American

film studies has been so controversial that I only have room to focus on academic critiques as opposed to broadly political ones. Narrowly academic critiques condemn auteurism and its theory for the false picture they give of cinematic activity, which they simplify at best and distort at worst. By contrast, broadly political critiques condemn auteurism for the inequities that it has fostered in the cinema. These hierarchical divisions have distributed credit, control, and money unfairly among different labor factions; have worsened the plight of women and minorities within the film industry; and have promoted the pursuit of individual goods at the expense of collective ones.

Of course, academic and political concerns are intertwined and rarely pure. Thus, the feminist critique has contended that auteurism has distorted film history retroactively even as it has served the patriarchy going forward. Similarly, what I call “the industrial complaint” has always accused the auteur theory of hiding the “negotiated and collective authorship” of many film industries even as it has fostered unfair exchanges of authorship capital across those film industries.<sup>105</sup> Given the prevalence of this sort of overlap, I am confident that in highlighting the various academic critiques of the auteur theory that I will by necessity do more than just gloss political critiques of the same. For sake of clarity and practicality, I have divided the academic critiques of auteurism into six rough categories: the industrial complaint, the New Critical complaint, the structuralist and poststructuralist complaint, the feminist and multiculturalist complaint, the sociological complaint, and, finally, the evolutionary complaint.

The industrial complaint, as articulated in studies like John Caldwell’s *Production Culture* (2008), considers auteurism and its theory untrue to the industrial practices of the cinema.<sup>106</sup> Thus, one of auteurism’s first critics, Pauline Kael, devoted

*The Citizen Kane Book* (1971) to “the refutation of [Sarris’s] theory that the director alone was the author of the film.”<sup>107</sup> This falsehood was most apparent in the most commercial spheres, where cinema’s collaborative nature should have been obvious but was often overshadowed by the bright aura that enshrouded prominent arthouse directors. (Consider that directors like Alain Resnais, Luis Buñuel, and Peter Greenaway drew on Sacha Vierney’s camerawork in becoming auteurs while Vierney himself remained a director of photography. Indeed, we might ask whether cinematographers like Greg Tolland, Sven Nykvist, and William Lubtchansky or editors like Dede Allen and Walter Murch have played similar roles in the construction of auteur celebrity.) In general, the industrial complaint considers the auteur’s star status tantamount to a production credit that is negotiated, contracted, and constructed and that is as much a result of movie promotion as it is of the director’s role as “prime mover.” Critics who take the theory too seriously, then, come off as naïve in this reading of the auteur tradition. Then again, depending on one’s point of view, anti-auteur critics can be guilty of something equally problematic if they inadvertently further the anti-collaborative thrust of auteur criticism by arguing for the ascendancy of different figures (or roles) in the industry, like the performer, the cinematographer, the writer, the editor, producer, or the studio as a whole.<sup>108</sup> Through such arguments, critics take part in the wranglings over credit rather than stepping back to analyze the collective processes that have shaped those wranglings.<sup>109</sup> On the other hand, this oddly auteurist brand of anti-auteurism did have potential benefits in that it could lead back to more modest claims of multiple authorship (as among crucial industrial figures, such as directors *and* writers) or, similarly, of corporate authorship (as credited to a production studio).<sup>110</sup> This trend in the scholarship

has seemed most reasonable when it has wended back, as in Bruce Kawin's essay "Authorship, Design, and Execution" (1992), to the idea that the "shared vision" of the entire collaborative system is the author of a movie.<sup>111</sup>

By contrast, the New Critical complaint contends that unitary film authors *do* exist, just as single literary authors exist, but that their existence does not secure the value of the aesthetic object, as auteur critics suggest, but is instead irrelevant to it.<sup>112</sup> Given that the new breed of film critics like V.F. Perkins disliked antiquated literary methods, from which they tried to differentiate their auteur procedures, they would have been galled by this attack on their theory, which is lumped with literary biography and other musty forms of evaluation. Still, the New Critical complaint was less dismissive of auteurism than the structuralist and poststructuralist complaints. Though these critiques have been too diverse and complex to submit to efficient paraphrase, it may be said that theorists, especially those aligned with the post-1968 editions of *Cahiers* and the 1970s editions of *Screen*, were discomfited by the conservative drift of auteur theory.<sup>113</sup> Thus, they drew on continental theorists like Jacques Lacan, Michel Foucault, and Christian Metz and the popular contempt for authority to treat the auteur as "a kind of epiphenomenon," which was an ideological product of our shared history, our shared language, and our industrial filmmaking apparatus.<sup>114</sup> Peter Wollen made significant compromises with this new way of theorizing cinema by inventing in *Signs and Meaning in the Cinema* (1969) the field of "auteur structuralism," which submitted films to semiotic critiques and treated the auteur as an "unconscious catalyst" for forces and meanings that the auteur neither fully created nor fully controlled.<sup>115</sup> If auteur structuralists continued to talk of auteurs, and most often of the *same* auteurs, they clearly

no longer addressed auteurs in the respectful, glorifying terms favored by earlier critics. Indeed, these demystifying attitudes toward the auteur drew heavily on the death-of-the-author notions that were popularized during this period by postmodern theorists like Foucault and Roland Barthes.<sup>116</sup>

The feminist and multiculturalist critiques of auteurism resembled the structuralist and poststructuralist critiques in that they tended to view auteurism as the result of sexist, heterosexist, and racist structures built into cinema through its industrial apparatus and its historical and ideological contexts. This attitude is typified by Laura Mulvey's famous *Screen* essay "Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema" (1975).<sup>117</sup> Here, the visual pleasure normalized by the cinema, especially Hollywood cinema and the commercial art cinema, were assumed to be white, heterosexual, and male, such that mass audiences were often encouraged to overlook their own traditions, including their own auteurs, in identifying with hegemonic traditions. In its Great White Man approach to the cinematic tradition, the auteur theory was deemed complicit with the hegemonic power; it was also seen as encouraging lazy critical and theoretical habits, habits that quite often neglected auteur traditions outside the dominant Euro-American purview.<sup>118</sup>

The next demystification of auteurism, the sociological critique, has framed the auteur as an institutional status achieved through cultural and subcultural means. Drawing on Pierre Bourdieu and Howard Becker, sociologists like Tatiana Heise, Andrew Tudor, and Shyon Baumann have confirmed that cultural categories such as "auteur" and "art cinema" have been created within particular sociohistorical contexts through consumerist taste competitions and through institutional standards of value, which have both driven the conjoined worlds of film, art, and consumer commerce.<sup>119</sup> Like the industrial critique,

the sociological critique sees auteurs in terms of the credit they accrue through personal ambition, skill, and luck; but unlike the industrial critique, the sociological critique does not necessarily see such status as an unrealistic response to collaborative production. Indeed, however unfair or unrealistic it seems within the heavily collaborative world of film, such status is the logical outcome of an array of social and commercial forces that have shaped the forms and functions of cinema in our culture. Hence, Baumann, in his excellent book *Hollywood Highbrow* (2007), provides us with an exacting account of how Hollywood directors gradually grew to think of themselves as auteurs, that is, as fine artists, in the 1960s and 1970s, when Hollywood cinema's "opportunity space" became much more conducive to such perceptions.<sup>120</sup> Of the critiques of the auteur theory that I have mentioned thus far, the two that remain most convincing today are the industrial critique and the sociological critique, both of which have departed from grand theory long enough to sample realities on the ground, putting them squarely in line with what is today the dominant trend in film studies, historicism.

But there is one further critique of auteurism, the evolutionary complaint, that has yet to penetrate film studies. As a relatively recent addition to the field, the evolutionary complaint is the least understood of the many critiques of film authorship. Unlike David Bordwell's brand of cognitivism, which focuses on individual films and on individual viewers, the evolutionary complaint is far more invested in evolutionary psychology and cultural evolution. In the humanities, its closest ties are to recent fields like "evolutionary literary criticism," as promoted by literary scholars like Joseph Carroll, and "evolutionary aesthetics," as promoted by philosophers of art like Denis Dutton.<sup>121</sup> These fields have a great deal to say about authorship and culture. By surveying the anthropological and

biological assumptions that unify these fields, we can begin to understand this complaint. For one thing, all of these fields take it for granted that human beings evolved a common “human nature” through prehistoric processes of natural selection and sexual selection. Though we have individual and cultural differences, these differences are limited by our fundamental human constraints—including our most essential functions, such as eating, sleeping, and reproducing, and our common traditions and practices, many of which have evolved culturally. Due to these constraints, which bind us together as a species, we cannot meaningfully describe our differences through ideas of “free will,” which have been crucial to the mystification of the director.<sup>122</sup> Overall, the evolutionary complaint is that auteurism unduly elevates the individual at the expense of the group, hiding the fact that our individual natures and works are finite and contingent on processes of selection that operate through nature and culture. Indeed, like the wider idea of authorship itself, auteurism seems to be a “meme” that has evolved through cultural means and that some evolutionists believe is a byproduct of adaptive processes.

Thirty years ago, Steve Neale noted in the pages of *Screen* that “authorship serves partly as a means by which to avoid coming to terms with the concept of film as social practice.”<sup>123</sup> This criticism still holds true today, for it is the thread that runs through all the critiques noted above save the New Critical complaint (which is even more vehement than auteurism in its rejection of the social). But once we add the evolutionary complaint to the mix, it becomes clear that the problem of authorship is both more general and more ironic. With it in tow, auteurism is unmasked as a way for humanities scholars to avoid coming to terms with the idea of film as a *human* practice, one constrained not just by social process but by our common biological nature as well.

## Why Auteurism Has Remained Dominant

Naremore has reported that the “ultimate answer” to the question posed recently by *Cahiers du cinéma* (““What happened to the *politique des auteurs*?””) is, quite simply, “nothing.” Auteurism hasn’t gone anywhere, for as anyone can see, “the star director is more visible than ever” as an industrial role and as a complex institution.<sup>124</sup> Given that the attacks on the auteur theory enumerated above have proved so credible and long-lived, we might wonder why auteurism has remained so dominant both in the marketplace and in numerous sectors of film studies, from crossover journals like *Film Comment*, *Positif*, and *Sight & Sound* to “the little books” that Mark Betz sees as perpetuating the auteur tradition within the academy.<sup>125</sup> In my view, the three most likely explanations for this persistence may be grouped under three overlapping headings: *the irrational hypothesis*, *the pragmatic hypothesis*, and *the institutional argument*.

The irrational hypothesis stresses that the belief in the auteur, like our idea of the author more generally, has never been subject to rational human control, whether inside or outside academia. For example, one way in which the auteurist argument has always gripped us is through the irrational strength of its literary analogy. As modern mass arts, the movie and the novel resemble one another in their narrative structures and in their modes of distribution and consumption. It has seemed commonsensical, then, to extend this analogy to production as well, using a modified argument-from-design to infer a discrete auteur for a movie. This wrongheaded analogy is reinforced by post-Renaissance art history, which has everywhere depended on ideas of individual creation and personal expression. But if this analysis provides insights into how auteurism initially gripped us,

it does not explain why auteurism has continued to grip us long after its romantic analogy has been relentlessly exploded by scholar after scholar.

To gain a fuller explanation, we may need to look to new sources of knowledge, including biological ones. For example, in *The Art Instinct* (2009), Dutton explains the persistence of authorship in the face of poststructuralist critiques by talking about the emotional tug exerted by the prehistoric functions of language.<sup>126</sup> Dutton hypothesizes that our languages, including our arts, evolved three functions in the Pleistocene, with the idea of authorship furthering each of them. Two of these evolved adaptations, the narrative function and the communicative function, are fairly straightforward and can be clearly shown to develop spontaneously in the course of normal childhood development. Thus, people find it easier to engage in the didactic and the imaginary elements of a film if they can imagine that it was created by a single artist, not by a collaborative band. But I think that Dutton's third linguistic function, the fitness evaluation, is even more relevant to our discussion of auteurism's status. According to Dutton, "the idea of the fitness test" looms behind "every act of speaking, descriptive or artistic":

Human beings are continuously judging their fellows in terms of the cleverness or the banality of their language use. Skillful employment of a large vocabulary, complicated grammatical constructions, wit, surprise, stylishness, coherence, and lucidity all have bearing on how we assess other human beings. Intentionally artistic uses of language are particularly liable to assessment in terms of what they reveal about the character of a speaker or writer.<sup>127</sup>

As a result, Dutton speculates that "it is from an evolutionary standpoint psychologically impossible to ignore the potential skill, craft, talent, or genius revealed in speech and writing," for our "intense interest in artistic skill, as well as the pleasure that it gives us, will not be denied: it is an extension of innate, spontaneous Pleistocene values, feelings, and attitudes."<sup>128</sup> For these linguistic functions to work efficiently in cinematic contexts,

people *must* see a single historical figure as the creator of a movie. What is more, people who have any inclination toward cinephilia at all *must* believe that some directors are “better” than others and thus deserve the status of auteur.<sup>129</sup> Of course, these ingrained habits might not lead us to the truths of art, let alone the truths of a collaborative art like cinema. But even if we understood all the truths of cinema, our ingrained attachment to single authors would “pull us back to assessing the capacities of a historical” figure.<sup>130</sup> As a result, the ideas of unconscious agency found in auteur structuralism and the theories of the postulated-author found in poststructuralist film theory are in Dutton’s view “bound to fail” in the long run.<sup>131</sup> They simply cannot compete with our preference for attributing the artistry of an artifact to a historical person, a preference that is an “adaptation derived from sexual selection off the back of natural selection.”<sup>132</sup>

Here the irrational hypothesis fades into the pragmatic hypothesis. In my vision of it, the pragmatic hypothesis has two major parts, the first of which emphasizes the overall convenience of using auteurism. This convenience is both cognitive and linguistic, since it is easier for our limited human brains to imagine and discuss a film if we imagine that film as “belonging” to an auteur rather than a collective, which would include cast and crew as well as above-the-line talent. This cognitive convenience, which is irrational as well as practical, has been built into our languages and institutions, including the journals that require us to put the director’s name after the title of the movie even within articles devoted to dismantling auteur concepts (as if authorship were as objective as the year-of-release). The other major component of the pragmatic hypothesis is the potential benefits of auteur status, which is useful to a tremendous crowd of people. The straightforward application of auteur notions in the film industry belies the often harried competition for

authorship credit that is *the* collective obsession of the film industry. But notice that all those involved want those credits and would deny them to others. Just understanding the complexity of a situation—or understanding its unfairness—is no guarantee that people will abandon it, given that it may benefit them personally. A number of anti-auteurist new waves have made this dynamic clear, as when the Dogme directors refused directorial credit in their “Vow of Chastity” but continued to function as auteurs.<sup>133</sup> This dynamic is even more obvious, I think, in feminist and minority contexts, where some writers want to abolish the idea of the auteur as a white, male, heterosexual mistake while others want to build up favored identity categories through auteur status by winning it for blacks, women, gays and lesbians, and so on.<sup>134</sup> Though the latter commentators often agree with the former regarding the biased origins of auteurism, they part ways on status, which the latter believe has no color, sex, or orientation. In the end, the inclusiveness and overall practicality of auteur status is one reason that scholars may want to adjust their idea of art cinema, expanding it to make way for auteur works by directors from highly untraditional backgrounds, including the most déclassé cult contexts.

Closely related to the pragmatic hypothesis is the institutional argument, which observes that auteurism isn’t going anywhere because it is so firmly rooted in the cultural and subcultural institutions that grew out of the postwar explosion of art cinema. Today, mainstream commercial cinemas, including traditional European art cinemas, Hollywood cinemas, and even cult cinemas, operate according to auteurist assumptions. Mainstream film magazines, cult fanzines and e-zines, and many prestigious crossover journals all operate on these assumptions, as do film festivals, granting agencies, and award systems. Through these and other value-oriented institutions, auteur status affords directors and

their communities various forms of social prestige, which they can in turn exchange for production funds, distribution deals, and even cash in the form of opportunities for grants, teaching stipends, and writing fees. This status is also useful within the academy, where avant-garde auteurs (often referred to as “artisans”) often make and teach experimental movies, and where scholars have used the auteur theory to their own ends. After all, as Naremore and others have noted, even when innovative scholars like Wollen were busy dismantling the auteur theory, they usually focused on directors like Hitchcock or Welles, handing the dominant tradition intact to the next generation.<sup>135</sup>

Why do refereed journals continue to publish what often amounts to politically correct auteur criticism, given the vast array of uncontested scholarly arguments against auteurism that are now piling up in research libraries? One reason among many: because scholars have reliable incentives to think in auteurist terms both in their teaching and in their most prestigious crossover publications. These incentives have done many things. They have, for instance, created the overarching sense that it is normal to endorse specific auteurs even when a scholar is dismantling auteurism. For another, academic auteurism agrees with the auteurism that has always been evident in mainstream film criticism. This continuity has in effect served to privilege the mainstream auteur approach as a sign of enduring values and, crucially, of enduring *truths* against the populist sense of the inaccessibility and flakiness of academic writing. But if film-theory monographs have on occasion been pushed toward the inaccessible by the necessities of the academic market, mainstream reviews have been anchored by their own economic necessities to auteur assumptions that have been unexamined and incomplete.

Using Auteurism Modestly

“A ‘personal’ horror film? How does that happen?”  
“When you put your heart and genitals into something, it always gets personal.”  
—*Tie Me Up! Tie Me Down!* (Pedro Almodovar, 1990)

Given that auteurism is not going anywhere, we should look for uses of it that might be reconciled with a clear analysis of cinema and especially of art cinema, which in the popular imagination is *the* auteur genre. Ideally, these uses would be demystified—that is, they would be clear about the irrational, pragmatic, and institutional appeals of auteurism—meaning that they would be overflowing with disclaimers and qualifications warning readers against these appeals. Why is this so necessary? Because if scholars do not approach auteurism in an explicitly savvy way, they are liable to slide back into naïve celebrations of the auteur and the auteur work—or, even if they avoid such an outcome, they may encourage a similar backsliding in others.

Consider the case of *Authorship and Film* (2003), a collection of essays edited by David Gerstner and Janet Staiger. This volume has been acknowledged as one of the most substantial collections on auteurism in years.<sup>136</sup> And make no mistake: it *is* a very distinguished book. After all, the overviews by Gerstner and Staiger that frame the book are worth the cover price by themselves. Unfortunately, the chapters that follow do not always measure up to the standards of their analysis. The reason for this is that the later chapters often focus on individual auteurs and individual works, whether they look at conventional auteurs (as in Wollen’s essay, “The Auteur Theory: Michael Curtiz, and *Casablanca*”) or less conventional ones (as in Sarah Projansky and Kent Ono’s essay, “Making Films Asian American: *Shopping for Fangs* and the Discursive Auteur”).<sup>137</sup> Though this restricted approach is in line with historicist precepts, its value to film theory is worth questioning. What can a single auteur tell us about cinema? This question recalls

Schatz's point about the cinema's collaborative hierarchies: the more sense we make of their complexities, "the less sense it makes to assess filmmaking or film style in terms of the individual director—or *any* individual, for that matter."<sup>138</sup> My view is that our uses of auteurism must always emphasize the fundamental contradiction of the auteur approach: that auteur status is hard and real but that the authorship to which that social status refers is subjective, negotiable, and marked by its distribution context.

Beyond that emphasis, our new auteur method could be molded to the specifics of whatever modest, mid-level questions we entertain. For example, we might ask how to go about identifying auteur works without falling into naïve celebrations. The short answer to this question is that it may be safest to concentrate on cult auteurs. This answer may seem counterintuitive. After all, film scholars have traditionally been compelled to pursue untraditional auteurs due to their interest in the avant-garde or their interest in social justice. Thus, they have often focused on neglected directors in experimental art cinemas or on marginalized directors in more traditional art cinemas whose sex, sexual identity, class, or ethnicity has not matched the white, heterosexual, male profile that has for the most part dominated the film industries of Europe and the U.S. But because scholars have wanted to redress such imbalances, they have also wanted to depict avant-garde, female, or minority directors as *deserving* their status—despite the fact that no filmmaker can be said to deserve any status in an absolute sense. An otherwise-admirable desire to level the playing field, so to speak, has thus discouraged them from creating historical scholarship that describes how a director's auteur status has flowed out of a specific production context or how it has been formed through compromises with distribution constraints. But when scholars look for auteurs among the creators of classic B movies—or among

the creators of contemporary splatter movies or the past decade's torture-porn movies—they seem much less likely to romanticize those auteurs or to separate them from their contexts. After all, such movies are culturally illegitimate. Any form-based argument that ignores their social and industrial contexts will rarely be very convincing in a culturally legitimate sphere like the academy. This dynamic may be unfair to cult auteurs, for again there is no absolute sense in which they deserve their status any less than more traditional auteurs deserve theirs. But the fact remains that the detailed contextualization that results from this biased dynamic works to the benefit of scholarship, for it guarantees that in scholarly work cult auteurs will remain rooted in the collective, collaborative contexts that have marked their art movies as well as their own status.

We can see this contextualization emerging from the old and the new scholarship on cult auteurs. Consider, e.g., the 1983 *Screen* article “My Name is Joseph H. Lewis,” in which Paul Kerr offers a detailed portrait of Joseph H. Lewis, the director of B films like *Gun Crazy* (1949) and *The Big Combo* (1955). Kerr's article accents the formal details that made Lewis's thrillers and noirs exciting to audiences even as it calls “into question the predictable—if problematic promotion of Lewis to the auteur pantheon . . .”<sup>139</sup> What I consider so academically progressive about this essay is that it ends by insisting that the constraints imposed by the Hollywood B system on would-be-auteurs were not “merely negative in their operation” but were in a sense responsible for whatever excellence was later perceived in the movies they influenced. As Kerr puts it, working in “the B *film noir* meant simply that the opportunities for commercial and critical success lay in certain (industrial, generic) directions rather than in others.”<sup>140</sup> Sharon Hayashi's 2010 article, “The Fantastic Trajectory of Pink Art Cinema from Stalin to Bush,” makes a similar

point about Koji Wakamatsu. Hayashi describes the process by which Wakamatsu—a director of Japanese eroductions or “pink” skin flicks such as *Secrets Behind the Wall* (1965)—constructed himself as an auteur within the confines of the pink film industry. According to Hayashi, Wakamatsu was successful in this because of the “desires of an international art film circuit eager to read Japanese film in art cinematic terms.”<sup>141</sup> As a result of the almost accidental global success of this “Pink Akira Kurosawa,” subsequent “producers began the strategic marketing and distribution of some pink films as art cinema.”<sup>142</sup> Once again, the achievement of the cult auteur is seen not as a product of towering genius or uncompromising personal vision but as a product of accidents and constraints that the auteur only had partial control over. If this way of perceiving cult auteurs seems biased when compared to the romantic scholarship that has often built up the “genius” of traditional auteurs from Orson Welles and Robert Bresson to Claire Denis and Apichatpong Weerasethukul, this bias has also led to a realistic perception of these cult auteurs. For in a sense, it has helped situate them as one complex element in a more complex collective context that remains the true author of the “masterpieces” that he or she has directed. All of which, I think, is as it should be.

Let me provide one more example of what I mean. When I was researching *Soft in the Middle* (2006), my book on American softcore, I noticed that Seduction Cinema was intent on building up the auteur discourse around a director who went by the name “Tony Marsiglia.”<sup>143</sup> Thus, Marsiglia was often shown in the DVD extras for movies like *Dr. Jekyll and Mistress Hyde* (2003), *Lust for Dracula* (2004), *Sinful* (2006), and *Chantal* (2007) shooting shots over and over, “performing” the same perfectionism that we have grown used to in promo pieces for Welles, Kubrick, or Hal Hartley. Later, I

understood that Marsiglia's role at Seduction was to raise the studio's subcultural status by making low-cost softcore art movies that benefited from his technique, creativity, and knowledge of film history. These factors made it possible for Seduction to bundle Marsiglia's movies with promotions that testified to his control and his freedom as an experimentalist—and they also made it plausible for Marsiglia to claim that his interest in softcore was abstract and aesthetic, not commercial and certainly not prurient. These were, of course, difficult claims to support in this distribution context, which, because it was dedicated to making softcore, was shot through with the commercial. On the other hand, such difficulties have not usually been that difficult for *auteurs* to negotiate—for regardless of how or where an auteur has established himself or herself, the auteur aura has been capable of obscuring or distorting whatever commercialism is evident in that auteur's distribution context. Thus the logic behind Seduction and Marsiglia's collaboration.

Of course, there are reasons to pursue auteurism into cult contexts other than the fact that doing so helps us avoid decontextualizing the auteur in overtly romantic ways. The auteur is a traditional emblem of art cinema, so finding auteurs in cult cinemas could help us arrive at straightforward understandings of a category that has proved notoriously difficult to define.<sup>144</sup> Given that any antiessentialist view of art cinema must use inclusive, value-neutral methods to identify works in the genre, it is reasonable to deploy objective signs of auteur discourse as one of the principal criteria for membership in any expanded idea of art cinema. The point of identifying art movies in this way is not to prove that a cult movie qualifies as “authentic” art cinema or that its director qualifies as a “true” auteur. Neither cultural status nor genre formation is immutable.<sup>145</sup> Instead, the point is to

formulate a credible art-historical narrative that relates *potential* art movies to more established art movies through objective signs of auteur discourse. (Incidentally, I have adapted this approach from Noël Carroll's method of identifying works of art through historical narratives.<sup>146</sup>) The auteurism that comes across either through this discourse or, in carefully qualified cases,<sup>147</sup> through the forms themselves may be used to bridge the divide between traditional art movies and more untraditional art movies. Ergo, through these narratives, we may identify new forms of art cinema in both big-budget genres and in low-budget genres, two sectors in which auteurism is today rampant. The unexpected inclusiveness of auteurism confirms the broad cultural impact of this critical attitude and its basic appeal to our human nature. Critics might object that discussing auteurism in these contexts extends a flawed attitude to new locations. But the fact is that auteurism is already there, and it is functioning *well* there.<sup>148</sup> Scholars should, it seems, figure out what it means to find high-status roles in relatively low-status areas.

### Auteurism, The Atavistic, Revenant Meme

In the end, Michel Ciment was correct: neither the auteur critics nor the new-wave phenomena they spawned may be cited as the origin of auteurism. Auteurism, it appears, doesn't have a single origin. It is, instead, rooted in ideas of authorship borrowed from other forms of art and communication, whose manifold roots extend back beyond the historical record. But the fact that there was no real start for auteurism offers one possible explanation for why it hasn't ended but is instead flourishing today despite the problems that have been found in its signature articulation, the auteur theory. Auteurism, it seems, is still flourishing because it is ingrained in our psyches as well as our institutions, where it enables all kinds of activity. But as scholars have realized, auteurism also shuts down

activity—for in the academy, it often substitutes romantic myths for more rational truths. My view is that scholars can neither ignore nor dismiss auteurism, for it is an atavistic, revenant meme. Instead, they must contrive methods for dealing with it that serve only rational ends. I hope that in this chapter I have demonstrated one such method by using auteurism to begin mapping out a new and more inclusive idea of art cinema as a super-genre that has long contained movies from both cult and mainstream industries. Luckily, in order to understand how auteurism can flourish within cult subcultures, scholars have always felt it necessary to show how cult auteurism has been an effect of certain cultural conditions and of particular subcultural constraints. This is all to the good, because one of the faults of auteur-based scholarship as applied to traditional auteurs and traditional art movies is that it has often removed auteurs from their human contexts, in effect blocking our understanding of how their auteur status was constructed through interactions with those contexts—and how those contexts shaped their works.

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#### <sup>85</sup>NOTES TO CHAPTER THREE

<sup>85</sup> John Caughie, “Introduction,” *Theories of Authorship: A Reader* (1981), ed. John Caughie (London: Routledge, 1988), p. 15. Caughie’s italics.

<sup>86</sup>

<sup>86</sup> Michel Ciment, “Letter to the Editors,” *Sight & Sound*, vol. 19, no. 6 (June 2009), p. 96.

<sup>87</sup>

<sup>87</sup> Thomas Schatz, *Hollywood Genres: Formulas, Filmmaking, and the Studio System* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1981), p. 7. See also Caughie, “Introduction,” p. 15.

<sup>88</sup> See Alexandre Astruc, “The Birth of a New Avant-Garde: La Camera-Style” (1948), *The New Wave: Critical Landmarks*, ed. Peter Graham (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1968), pp. 17–23. For more on Astruc, see David Gerstner, “The Practices of Authorship,” *Authorship and Film*, ed. David Gerstner and Janet Staiger (New York: Routledge, 2003), pp. 6–7; see also Janet Staiger, “Authorship Approaches,” *Authorship and Film*, ed. David Gerstner and Janet Staiger (New York: Routledge, 2003), pp. 34–35.

<sup>89</sup> Edward Buscombe argues that Sarris translated a set of critical *policies* into a full-blown *theory*, creating the sense that *la politique des auteurs* was meant to explain cinema—something the *Cahiers* critics did not intend. See Edward Buscombe, “Ideas of Authorship,” *Theories of Authorship: A Reader* (1981), ed. John Caughie (London: Routledge, 1988), p. 22. See Andrew Sarris, “Toward a Theory of Film History” and “The Auteur Theory Revisited,” *The American Cinema: Directors and Directions, 1929–1968*, (1968; Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1985), pp. 19–37 and 269–278, respectively.

<sup>90</sup> See Caughie, “Introduction,” pp. 9–16, and Buscombe, “Ideas of Authorship,” pp. 22–34. See also Gerstner, “The Practices of Authorship,” pp. 3–25, and Staiger, “Authorship Approaches,” pp. 27–57. Finally, see James Naremore, “Authorship,” *A Companion to Film Theory*, ed. Toby Miller and Robert

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Stam (Malden, MA: Blackwell, 2004), pp. 18-22. For an exhaustive overview, see Pam Cook, "Authorship and Cinema," *The Cinema Book* (1985), ed. Pam Cook (London: BFI, 2007), pp. 387-483.

<sup>91</sup> The phrasing is Cook's. See Cook, "Authorship and Cinema," p. 479. This observation was obvious to scholars as early as 1983, when Paul Kerr, referring to the anti-auteurist thrust of Caughie's anthology, noted in the pages of *Screen* that "auteurism refuses to go away," for it is "difficult—if not altogether impossible—to entirely dispense with it." Paul Kerr, "My Name is Joseph H. Lewis" (1983), *Auteurs and Authorship: A Film Reader*, ed. Barry Keith Grant (Malden, MA: Blackwell, 2008), p. 234.

<sup>92</sup> Thomas Schatz, *The Genius of the System: Hollywood Filmmaking in the Studio Era* (New York: Pantheon, 1988), p. 5.

<sup>93</sup> Caughie, "Introduction," p. 13. Caughie contends that "the attention to *mise en scène*, even to the extent of a certain historically necessary formalism, is probably the most important positive contribution of *auteurism* to the development of a precise and detailed film criticism, engaging with the specific mechanisms of visual discourse, freeing it from literary models, and from the liberal commitments which were prepared to validate films on the basis of their themes alone." Caughie's italics. Grant agrees, arguing that auteurism's "legacy is that it encouraged a more serious examination of the movies beyond mere 'entertainment' and helped move the nascent field of film studies beyond its literary beginnings to a consideration of film's visual qualities." Barry Keith Grant, "Introduction," *Auteurs and Authorship: A Film Reader*, ed. Barry Keith Grant (Malden, MA: Blackwell, 2008), p. 5.

<sup>94</sup> Gerstner, "The Practices of Authorship," p. 5. The most nuanced sociological treatment of this theme is found in Shyon Baumann's *Hollywood Highbrow: From Entertainment to Art* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2007). Baumann argues that the distribution of auteur-driven art films across the globe led to new cinephile markets and indirectly created "a pathway for the consecration of Hollywood films as art." Baumann, *Hollywood Highbrow*, p. 149; see also pp. 10, 61-64, 113, and 177.

<sup>95</sup> Staiger attributes the notion of the auteur as a "prime mover" to anti-auteurists like Pauline Kael. Staiger, "Authorship Approaches," pp. 31-32.

<sup>96</sup> Sarris, *The American Cinema*, p. 35.

<sup>97</sup> See François Truffaut, "A Certain Tendency of the French Cinema," *Auteurs and Authorship: A Film Reader*, ed. Barry Keith Grant (Malden, MA: Blackwell, 2008), pp. 9-18; André Bazin, Jacques Doniol-Valcroze, Pierre Kast, Roger Leenhardt, Jacques Rivette, Éric Rohmer, "Six Characters in Search of Auteurs: A Discussion about the French Cinema" (1957), *The European Cinema Reader*, ed. Catherine Fowler (London: Routledge, 2002), pp. 64-72; Jean-Luc Godard, "The Face of French Cinema Has Changed" (1959), *Godard on Godard* (New York: Da Capo Press, 1986), pp. 146-147; twenty-six German filmmakers, "The Oberhausen Manifesto" (1962), *The European Cinema*, ed. Catherine Fowler (London: Routledge, 2002), p. 73. See also Jonas Mekas, "The First Statement of the New American Cinema Group," 30 September 1962. Post on the Film-Makers' Cooperative website. <<http://www.film-makerscoop.com/history.htm>>. Accessed 4 April 2009.

<sup>98</sup> Godard, "The Face of French Cinema," pp. 146-147.

<sup>99</sup> Truffaut was engaged in a form of taste warfare that sought, through an auteur policy that elevated his favorite French directors, to upset the assumptions that privileged the "tradition of quality" with its stress on literature, adaptation, and politics. This is why John Hess launched his famous counterattack on Truffaut in the second installment of his *Jump Cut* analysis of *la politique des auteurs* (1974). See John Hess, "La Politique des Auteurs, Part Two: Truffaut's Manifesto," *Jump Cut*, no. 2 (July-August 1974), p. 22. Hess discerned in Truffaut's essays a narrow worldview typified by the "the cultural and political conservatism" of a critic mainly interested in the turf wars of his own time and place.

<sup>100</sup> Bazin *et al.*, "Six Characters," p. 69. Schatz gives Bazin credit for the phrase, "genius of the system," which Bazin used in reference to Hollywood in 1957. Schatz, *The Genius of the System*, p. xiii.

<sup>101</sup> Bazin *et al.*, "Six Characters," p. 69.

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<sup>102</sup> Gerstner, "The Practices of Authorship," pp. 8-9, and Staiger, "Authorship Approaches," pp. 37-38. See also Sarris, *The American Cinema*, pp. 19-37.

<sup>103</sup> See Jonathan Rosenbaum, *Essential Cinema: On the Necessity of Film Canons* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2004), pp. xi-xxi.

<sup>104</sup> For example, as John Hess explained in the first installment of his 1974 critique of the theory, one thing the auteur critics were rebelling against was the idea that the cinema should be political. Cinema in France after the Liberation was often political, reflecting a range of postwar concerns that privileged the collective over the individual. Hess saw critics like Truffaut reversing that trend in classical French cinema. But time was not on the auteurs' side, as reflected by the increasing radicalism of Godard's output in the 1960s, by the growing leftism of American auteur critics like Susan Sontag, and by the conflicted politics reflected in period dramas like Bernardo Bertolucci's *The Dreamers* (2003). In retrospect, the auteurs' initial quest for apolitical autonomy seems like a brief interlude between the political storms of 1945 and 1968. So while the apolitical bent of this brand of auteurism may have helped it consecrate the cinema and institutionalize film studies, this quality could not last long in those quarters. See John Hess, "La Politique des Auteurs, Part One: World View as Aesthetics," *Jump Cut*, no. 1 (May-June 1974), pp. 19-20.

<sup>105</sup> John Thornton Caldwell, *Production Culture: Industrial Reflexivity and Critical Practice in Film and Television* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2008), p. 199.

<sup>106</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 198-201. See also Staiger, "Authorship Approaches," pp. 40-43.

<sup>107</sup> Quoted in Cook, "Authorship and Cinema," p. 410. See also Gerstner, "The Practices of Authorship," p. 9, and Staiger, "Authorship Approaches," pp. 38-40.

<sup>108</sup> See Graham Petrie, "Alternatives to Auteurs" (1973), *Auteurs and Authorship: A Film Reader*, ed. Barry Keith Grant (Malden, MA: Blackwell, 2008), pp. 110-112.

<sup>109</sup> In *Auteurs and Authorship*, Barry Keith Grant provides many variations on this anti-auteurist gambit, including everything from Richard Koszarki's essay on the contributions of Hollywood camera operators (1972; pp. 135-139) and Richard Corliss's (1973; pp. 140-147) and Gore Vidal's (1976; pp. 148-157) essays on the contributions of screenwriters to Jerome Christensen's (2006; pp. 167-179) and Matthew Bernstein's (2006; pp. 180-189) essay on the contributions of studios and producers. Grant also includes Bruce Kavin's brilliant essay "Authorship, Design, and Execution" (1992; pp. 190-199), which in a sense draws the lesson of this auteurist pattern by making a case for a collective idea of authorship. In a lecture at the University of Chicago, Giaime Alonge argued that the anti-auteur critics who elevated classical screenwriters like Ben Hecht continued the "myth of the author" under a new name. Giaime Alonge, "Hacks and Authors: Ben Hecht, the *Politique des Auteurs*, and Scriptwriting in Classical Hollywood," unpublished lecture (Chicago: University of Chicago; March 16, 2010).

<sup>110</sup> E.g., Corliss ends his essay by promoting the idea of "the multiple auteur," which is one part of a "giant matrix of coordinate talents." Richard Corliss, "Notes on a Screenwriter's Theory, 1973" (1974), *Auteurs and Authorship: A Film Reader*, ed. Barry Keith Grant (Malden, MA: Blackwell, 2008), p. 147.

<sup>111</sup> Bruce Kavin, "Authorship, Design, and Execution," p. 199.

<sup>112</sup> Naremore, "Authorship," pp. 17-18.

<sup>113</sup> Here Caughie's *Theories of Authorship* is especially helpful, for it contains essays and excerpts from the most relevant contributors to *Cahiers* and *Screen*, including all the original auteur critics as well as Wollen, Buscombe, Jean-Louis Comolli, Geoffrey Nowell-Smith, Stephen Heath, and others.

<sup>114</sup> Naremore, "Authorship," p. 19.

<sup>115</sup> See Peter Wollen, *Signs and Meaning in the Cinema* (1969; Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1973), p. 113.

<sup>116</sup> For more on the structuralist and poststructuralist critiques of auteurism, see Gerstner, "The Practices of Authorship," p. 10-17, and Staiger, "Authorship Approaches," pp. 43-49. Barthes's essay "The Death of the

Author" (1968) is reprinted in *Auteurs and Authorship: A Film Reader*, ed. Barry Keith Grant (Malden, MA: Blackwell, 2008), pp. 97-100.

<sup>117</sup> See Laura Mulvey, "Visual Pleasure in the Narrative Cinema," *Screen*, vol. 16, no. 3 (Autumn 1975), pp. 6-18.

<sup>118</sup> For two particularly successful overviews of this kind of critique, see Gerstner, "The Practices of Authorship," and Staiger, "Authorship Approaches," pp. 17-21 and 49-52, respectively.

<sup>119</sup> See Tatiana Heise and Andrew Tudor, "Constructing (Film) Art: Bourdieu's Field Model in a Comparative Context," *Cultural Sociology*, vol. 1, no. 2 (2007), pp. 165-187; Andrew Tudor, "The Rise and Fall of the Art (House) Movie," *The Sociology of Art: Ways of Seeing*, ed. David Inglis and John Hughson (New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2005), pp. 125-138; Kathryn Ramey, "Between Art, Industry, and Academia: The Fragile Balancing Act of the Avant-Garde Film Community," *Visual Anthropology Review*, vol. 18, nos. 1-2 (2002), pp. 22-36; and Shyon Baumann, "Intellectualization and Art World Development: Film in the United States," *American Sociological Review*, vol. 66 (June 2001), pp. 404-426. (See also Baumann, *Hollywood Highbrow*.)

<sup>120</sup> Baumann, *Hollywood Highbrow*, pp. 61-66. For definitions of "opportunity space," see *ibid.*, pp. 14-15.

<sup>121</sup> For example, see Joseph Carroll, *Evolution and Literary Theory* (Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 1995), and Denis Dutton, *The Art Instinct: Beauty, Pleasure, and Human Evolution* (New York: Bloomsbury Press, 2009).

<sup>122</sup> For two very different dismantlings of free will, see Matt Ridley, *Genome: The Autobiography of a Species in 23 Chapters* (New York: Perennial, 2000), pp. 301-313, and Daniel Wegner, *The Illusion of Conscious Will* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 2002). The picture of free will that is currently fighting for survival in the scientific literature bears only a passing resemblance to the more traditional idea that is still taken for granted in the humanities, where it has political implications. As Martin Heisenberg explained in *Nature*, the concept of free will that has recently been "under attack as never before" in science and philosophy. Martin Heisenberg, "Is Free Will an Illusion?," *Nature*, vol. 459, no. 14 (May 2009), p. 164; see 165. But the lines of attack haven't changed much over the centuries. Advocates of free must still do battle with the unyielding "principle that any action must be dependent on preceding causes," a concept that suggests that "our behaviour is never self-generated and that freedom is an illusion." But to understand just how far the tide has turned against traditional Cartesian ideas of free will, we should consider the way that free will is now defended, for the concept that scientists like Heisenberg have been trying to protect is a deflated one that traditionalists would scarcely recognize. Indeed, these researchers have been combating the deterministic evidence against free will (e.g., "our brain makes decisions up to seven seconds before we become aware of them") by marshalling evidence that opposes any all-encompassing determinism (including evidence of random behavior in unicellular organisms and of adaptive behavior in fruit flies). They hope to use these contrary data, however picayune, in support of a qualified idea of free will, one that holds out hope that an "animal's behaviour cannot be reduced to responses."

<sup>123</sup> Steve Neale, "Art Cinema as Institution," *Screen*, vol. 22, no. 1 (Spring 1981), p. 37.

<sup>124</sup> Naremore, "Authorship," p. 21.

<sup>125</sup> See Betz, "Little Books," *Inventing Film Studies*, ed. Lee Grieveson and Haidee Wasson (Durham: Duke University Press, 2008), pp. 319-349.

<sup>126</sup> Dutton, *The Art Instinct*, pp. 172; see pp. 172-176.

<sup>127</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 174.

<sup>128</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 175-176.

<sup>129</sup> If, as Caughie avers, it is crucial that scholars who are intent on transcending auteurism understand "the fascination of the figure of the *auteur*, and the way he is used in the cinephile's pleasure," it is also crucial that these scholars consider that such pleasure may be part of the cinephile's biological inheritance—and that it would not *be* that pleasure if the cinephile construed the auteur as a constructed "figure" rather than as a real historical person. Caughie, "Introduction," p. 15.

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<sup>130</sup> Dutton, *The Art Instinct*, p. 176.

<sup>131</sup> Ibid.

<sup>132</sup> Ibid., p. 175. For more on the biocultural mechanisms connecting sexual selection and art, see Geoffrey Miller, "Arts of Seduction" (2000), *Evolution, Literature, and Film: A Reader*, ed. Brian Boyd, Joseph Carroll, and Jonathan Gottschall (New York: Columbia University Press, 2010), pp. 165; and David Buss, "Evolutionary Psychology: The New Science of the Mind" (2008), *Evolution, Literature, and Film: A Reader*, ed. Brian Boyd, Joseph Carroll, and Jonathan Gottschall (New York: Columbia University Press, 2010), p. 26. Here we should remember, of course, that a number of noted evolutionists, including Stephen Jay Gould, Steven Pinker, and Jerry Coyne, have disputed that evolutionary science can rigorously analyze the arts, observing that efforts to establish an adaptive basis for our current aesthetic dispositions tends to reinforce the arts' traditional prestige. See, for example, Jerry Coyne, *Why Evolution is True* (New York: Viking, 2009), pp. 228-33. And it is true that the theories of an "evolutionary aesthetician" like Dutton are largely speculative, rooted in comparative anthropology and a thorough understanding of evolutionary science and the philosophy of art. But in the end, I do not believe film theory, which has always been largely speculative, needs to "do" science in order to deflate auteurism. After all, we can agree that Dutton's theorization offers a *potential* logical explanation for auteurism's persistence without forgetting that it is impossible to prove anything about our ancestral experience in the Pleistocene. And whether we agree with Dutton's point or not, we must, I think, agree with him about the tug of authorship, which offers a satisfying way of discussing the arts, including its collaborative forms.

<sup>133</sup> Lars von Trier and Thomas Vinterberg, "Dogme 95—The Vow of Chastity" (1995), *The European Cinema Reader*, ed. Catherine Fowler (London: Routledge, 2002), p. 83.

<sup>134</sup> See Gerstner, "The Practices of Authorship," pp. 17-21, and Staiger, "Authorship Approaches," pp. 49-52; and Cook, "Authorship and Cinema," pp. 468-473. Feminists who have argued against applying a classic idea of auteurism to women directors include Angela Martin, who, in discussing Kathryn Bigelow's work, has suggested that auteurism can benefit some women while still hurting all women, since women tend to be thought of as auteurs in especially restrictive ways. See Angela Martin, "Refocusing Authorship in Women's Filmmaking" (2003), *Auteurs and Authorship: A Film Reader*, ed. Barry Keith Grant (Malden, MA: Blackwell, 2008), pp. 130-131.

<sup>135</sup> Naremore, "Authorship," p. 20.

<sup>136</sup> E.g., Bill Scalia, "Review of *Authorship and Film*," *The Journal of Film and Video*, vol. 56, no. 1 (Spring 2004), pp. 51-53.

<sup>137</sup> Peter Wollen, "The Auteur Theory: Michael Curtiz, and *Casablanca*," *Authorship and Film*, ed. David Gerstner and Janet Staiger (New York: Routledge, 2003), pp. 61-76; Sarah Projansky and Kent Ono, "Making Films Asian American: *Shopping for Fangs* and the Discursive Auteur," *Authorship and Film*, ed. David Gerstner and Janet Staiger (New York: Routledge, 2003), 263-280. Nearly every other essay in this anthology follows this general pattern. Thus, most of them call for new understandings of traditional ideas of auteurism while also calling for reappraisals of the auteur and noting various underrecognized points of genius in the auteur's work.

<sup>138</sup> Schatz, *The Genius of the System*, p. 5.

<sup>139</sup> Kerr, "My Name is Joseph H. Lewis," p. 247.

<sup>140</sup> Ibid.

<sup>141</sup> Sharon Hayashi, "The Fantastic Trajectory of Pink Art Cinema from Stalin to Bush," *Global Art Cinema: New Theories and Histories*, ed. Rosalind Galt and Karl Schoonover (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010), p. 48.

<sup>142</sup> Ibid.

<sup>143</sup> Tony's Marsiglia's real name appears to be "Anthony Michael Kane." For more on his work, see David Andrews, *Soft in the Middle: The Contemporary Softcore Feature in its Contexts* (Columbus: Ohio State University Press, 2006), pp. 246-249.

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<sup>144</sup> On the difficulties of “art cinema,” see my article “Toward an Inclusive, Exclusive Approach to Art Cinema,” *Global Art Cinema: New Theories and Histories* (Oxford: Oxford University Press), pp. 62-74.

<sup>145</sup> On the contingency of genres, see Rick Altman, *Film/Genre* (London: British Film Institute, 1999).

<sup>146</sup> See Noël Carroll, *Philosophy of Art: A Contemporary Introduction* (London: Routledge, 1999), pp. 260-266. See also Stephen Davies, *Definitions of Art* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1991), pp. 167-169. This approach is explained in the previous chapter.

<sup>147</sup> Even if we do not have firsthand evidence about how directors have worked or have been promoted, we may still label them “auteurs” based on their use of motifs consecrated by prestigious gatekeepers like Bazin, Truffaut, Sarris, or Bordwell. But we must qualify our formal criteria carefully to verify that they have actual precedents in the work of the gatekeepers of traditional institutions or untraditional institutions. And this approach is only necessary if we *cannot* verify the historical details. Thus, it would not be necessary in the case of a low-budget horror flick like Nacho Cerdà’s *The Abandoned* (2006). In this movie, the mimicry of Andrei Tarkovsky’s technique is clear, making it tempting to formulate an art-historical narrative based on form alone. But even a cursory Internet search is enough to turn up firsthand evidence that this mimicry was intentional. Such evidence should be the basis for any historical narrative tying one auteur to the other. Still, even in an Internet age, this kind of evidence is not available for all cult vehicles. In such cases, we may depend on formal evidence where such evidence is strong. For example, despite our inability to find background info on the late-night-cable movie *Anthony’s Desire* (1993) or its writer-director, Tom Boka, we can place the film as a softcore art film and Boka as an aspiring auteur by formulating an art-historical narrative that relates the film’s untraditional narrative-number format, a hallmark of porn, to its aspirational motifs. These signs of auteurism include many of the stylistic institutions of art cinema. To wit, *Anthony’s Desire* focuses its diegesis on art; uses open psychology in its characterization; foregrounds the act of filmmaking; often alludes to Godard; contains a disinterested sexual vision and an orchestral score; depends on *temps mort*; and relies on long takes, long shots, and moving cameras. But we must always acknowledge that we cannot grasp cult auteurism in traditional terms alone. When we deploy formal evidence in our identifying narratives, we must be as sensitive as possible to subcultural motifs such as the narrative-number structure—which can be a difficult knowledge to attain, given the multiplicity and the instability of these subcultural traditions.

<sup>148</sup> For evidence of this, see Jeffrey Sconce, “‘Trashing the Academy’: Taste, Excess, and an Emerging Politics of Cinematic Style,” *Screen*, vol. 36, no. 4 (Winter 1995), pp. 371-393.

## Chapter Four / From “Foreign Films” to “World Cinema”

“Have you ever seen any of those, you know, those foreign films?”

“Yes, frequently.”

“I don’t like ’em.”

—*Lolita* (Stanley Kubrick, 1962)

Though terms like “the mainstream” or “mainstream cinema” are often used with contempt in art-cinema circles, they are not always terms of derision in actual art movies. After all, these terms reflect common human desires ranging from a straightforward, even hard-wired taste for accessible films to an equally natural desire to fit in. Hence, we often see such desires dramatized in art-film narratives, depictions that are not always negative. For example, in my epigraph, Dolores “Lolita” Haze signals her desire to return to the norms of American childhood by rejecting “those foreign films.” It does not bode well for Humbert Humbert that Lolita, who has been identified with Hollywood and with pop culture, repudiates an oppositional film category that was in 1962 synonymous with outré depictions of sex. Through this coded statement, then, Lolita returns to the mainstream, rejecting pedophilia and Humbert’s alternative lifestyle.

In 1998, as a new assistant professor, I watched Stanley Kubrick’s film with my undergraduates and was certain these meanings did not come across. My supposition at the time was that the term “foreign films” had long since lost its potency, becoming a more neutral consumer category that was even then interchanged with the term “world

cinema” by gigantic retailers like Blockbuster. Without a sense of that exotic mystique, we might hear in this tragicomic exchange no more than my students heard: namely, the obliviousness of a twelve-year-old who hasn’t fully considered that her interlocutor, as a European exile, would have seen many “foreign films” and might even have liked some of them, too. In itself, this lost meaning is not a big deal. But because the U.S. domestic market has had such an outsize impact on global cinema, this change in American idiom offers us some exceptionally intriguing insights, including a few new perspectives on our current academic debates over the term “world cinema.”

Hence, in this chapter, I look first at the old American usage of “foreign films,” a term that was in the postwar period identified with “art films” and “sex films.” The sense of the forbidden implicit to this term softened over time until it became a fairly neutral classifier that in the U.S. now refers to non-American films across many genres. The first purpose of this chapter is to abstract this transformation so we might understand it clearly and perhaps relate it to similar phenomena elsewhere. The second purpose is to offer a concise notion of “world cinema.” After looking at some of the debates enmeshing this term, I argue that “world cinema” has been used in mainstream markets as a politically correct genre category that helps maximize the distribution of the movies it classifies. It avoids obvious ethnocentrism and is useful all over the world. However, because “world cinema” has for the most part been used as a classifier that distinguishes Hollywood from non-Hollywood cinemas, it has never entirely escaped the hints of exoticism that marked “foreign films.” Thus, it remains a focus of academic controversy. In the end, I believe that we can transcend these debates—and retain the classifying function of the term—by deploying “world cinema” with precision, respect, and context.

deal on

—Andrew Sarris, “Why the Foreign Film Has Lost its Cachet” (1999)<sup>149</sup>

Where did this edge or cachet—which Andrew Sarris refers to as the “ooh-la-la factor”<sup>152</sup>—come from? The ultimate historical context of this usage was the commercial dominance of Hollywood in its golden era, which began in the late 1920s. Because major studios like Paramount had moved toward vertical integration by the 1920s, Hollywood was at the start of the sound era so comfortable in its industrial dominance that it chose to regulate itself through the “Don’ts and Be Carefuls” of 1927 and the Production Code of

1930 rather than risk being regulated by outsiders such as censorship boards or federal agencies. Almost as soon as the industry began, censorship laws and paternalistic interest groups had depicted silent-era Hollywood as an immoral business that was a major threat to young people, women, and the urban poor. Indeed, before 1934, when the Code was first enforced, Hollywood was notorious for its permissiveness, due to its use of nudity and risqué themes. Clearly, the dichotomy implied by “foreign films”—that is, between healthy domestic “entertainment” and unsafe, if intriguing, foreign “art”—was not all that consistent in the silent era.<sup>153</sup> But the adoption of the new Code-era regulations originated new markets for “alternative” producers and distributors, both foreign and domestic, who were happy to traffic in the licentious. Among other things, these changes created much clearer contrasts between Hollywood films and foreign films.

This happened quickly. Eric Schaefer has noted that foreign films had a prewar history on alternative distribution circuits, where they were “often wrapped in the lurid garments of exploitation.”<sup>154</sup> According to Schaefer, the “most infamous foreign film to be released during the 1930s, and the motion picture that cemented the connections between imported films and salaciousness, was *Ecstasy*.”<sup>155</sup> Gustav Machatý’s film was imported in 1935 and thus had a very troubled American reception, inspiring censorship concerns and some interesting debates about Hollywood entertainment as it related to foreign artistry. “Foreignness, art, and obscenity were conflated,” writes Schaefer. “Because foreign films spilled over categories . . . they were not contained within traditional boundaries and thus were obscene.”<sup>156</sup> Thus, a precedent for presenting and receiving European imports as arty sexploitation had been set before the Second World War; this tool was then standardized after the War, when those imports increased in number.

Indeed, the promise of sex definitely helped circulate foreign art films just after the war. Borrowing “techniques from the exploitation market to ‘sex up’ film titles and advertising,” as Tino Balio puts it, American distributors played up the sexual elements of foreign films even when their content was not all that racy.<sup>157</sup> Armed with the “idea that it’s European, therefore it’s artistic and consequently it’s risqué,” as exploitation director Barry Mahon once reasoned,<sup>158</sup> distributors of such tame postwar neorealist art films as *Roma, città aperta* (1945) and *The Bicycle Thief* (1948) relied on creativity to promote their limited sex content. This sexploitation angle was crucial everywhere in acting as a “‘biological lure’” drawing audiences to art-house films.<sup>159</sup> But it seemed most crucial in circulating art in rural areas, as art films spread beyond their traditional

confines in urban centers and college towns, where a film's prestige might have been enough to promote it alone. Indeed, Schaefer suggests just how "powerful the sex angle could be" in citing *Variety*'s 1948 estimate that "the average foreign film made 60 percent of its revenues in New York, whereas 'sexacious pix' or those with a good exploitation angle garner 25% from Gotham and the balance from the hinterlands."<sup>160</sup>

Once this selling point was identified, later foreign films, including *One Summer of Happiness* (1951), *Sommaren med Monika* (1953), *The Game of Love* (1954), *Et Dieu . . . créa la femme* (1956), *Les amants* (1958), *Hiroshima mon amour* (1959) and *La dolce vita* (1960), gave American distributors more of what they wanted. Of these Swedish, French, and Italian films, the most influential of them all was Roger Vadim's *Et Dieu . . . créa la femme*, the Bardot vehicle that by itself raised the profile of foreign art films in the U.S.<sup>161</sup> Vadim's success spawned a dash to sexual explicitness that began at the same general moment that the international festival circuit and its audiences were embracing auteurism in an increasingly organized fashion. The synergies of this combination gave the new über-auteurs like Ingmar Bergman, Jean-Luc Godard, and Federico Fellini what amounted to a "free pass" to shoot the "sexacious pix" that their producers wanted them to shoot.<sup>162</sup> By the early 1960s, commercially minded distributors from across America were scouring Europe, looking for sexualized films like Mac Ahlberg's *Jeg – en kvinde* (1965)—which Radley Metzger re-released as *I, a Woman* in 1966—to sell as auteur works. Metzger later cut out the middleman, mimicking the stylization of these films while bolstering their sex content by shooting his own art-sex auteur films, including *Carmen, Baby* (1967), in Europe. The result of this trend was that "[e]xplicit sexuality became expected in foreign films, to such an extent that 'foreign

film,' 'art film,' 'adult film,' and 'sex film' were for several years almost synonyms," as Peter Lev affirms.<sup>163</sup> Indeed, even foreign art films produced within relatively repressive filmmaking contexts could be influenced by this confluence of events, as a pre-Revolutionary Iranian film like Fereydun Gole's *Under the Skin of the Night* (1974) shows.

How did this all happen? First, we need to remember a point that Howard Becker emphasizes in *Art Worlds* (1982): people require a measure of political freedom before they can organize themselves into culturally significant art worlds.<sup>164</sup> Indeed, even liberal societies that grant their people many freedoms are, due to differences in local conditions, at different stages in the development of their art worlds. As Shyon Baumann has noted, in the first half of the last century, “social conditions in Europe were more amenable to the development of an art world for film than they were in the United States.”<sup>165</sup> It wasn’t simply that the European industries that made relatively explicit foreign films faced no internal constraints but that they had more incentives after a war that shattered their film industries to challenge those constraints—incentives that often included state subsidies and other monetary rewards. By contrast, classical Hollywood assumed its own vertically integrated dominance, so it had a smaller incentive to take on risk and accepted a measure of repression based on the judgments of censorship boards and Supreme Court decisions like the 1915 *Mutual* decision. Given its strength in a field constrained by censorship, Hollywood could afford to give in to pressure groups that demanded that it clean up its act. Indeed, even after Hollywood had in effect ceded certain materials to “alternative” foreign and domestic producers not governed by the Code, it didn’t have to worry about losing domestic market share, which was ensured not only by community censorship but by its own local control over distribution and exhibition.

All this began to change, however, around the time that the first neorealist works arrived in America. Indeed, in 1948, the main support of the golden-era system—vertical integration—was knocked out by the Paramount decrees, which opened new theaters to foreign films that lacked a Production Code Administration (or PCA) seal. After that, the

Supreme Court, guided by America's free-speech laws, overturned its *Mutual* decision in *Joseph Burstyn, Inc. v. Wilson* (1952). Because of the latter case—which was related to the U.S. exhibition of a neorealist work directed by Roberto Rossellini, written by Fellini, and distributed by Joseph Burstyn, a very significant American distributor of foreign art films—censorship concerns that in a sense guaranteed the classical Hollywood system were wiped out. After that, exhibitors of films like Louis Malle's *Les amants* won more legal cases, opening even mainstream theaters to risqué movies. By then, Hollywood had begun to copy the tactics of foreign producers, diminishing the sense of their difference—and contributing to the creation of a legitimate art-world in a Hollywood industry that had traditionally been dominated by the entertainment ideal.

*Lolita*'s release may be considered, then, something of a high watermark for this American usage of “foreign films.” As Schaefer puts it, by “the early 1960s, the terms art theater and art film had become synonymous with nudity, completing the cycle begun with *Ecstasy*.”<sup>166</sup> But the tide did begin to turn after 1962. With its old “entertainment” model looking obsolete, Hollywood devised responses to its new competitors, including foreign films and television, and new products for its newly educated and cosmopolitan American audience, which increasingly chose adult-oriented fare when choosing movies at all. Thomas Guback, Lev, and Balio have shown that Hollywood invested in European co-productions of the 1960s, including risqué films by foreign auteurs like Michelangelo Antonioni's *Blow-Up* (1966). At times, individual studios acquired entire subsidiaries just so that they could distribute the racy foreign films that those subsidiaries specialized in without violating industry rules.<sup>167</sup> But domestic Hollywood producers continued to chafe at the self-imposed censorship at home. Hence, the early 1960s were characterized by

challenges to the Code that occurred against the backdrop of declines in attendance for Hollywood movies and steady increases for foreign films.

After the success of adult-oriented, auteur-driven Hollywood films such as Mike Nichols' *Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf* in 1966 and then Arthur Penn's *Bonnie and Clyde* in 1967, Jack Valenti, the new head of the MPAA, installed a rating system in place of the Production Code. This system, which went into effect in November 1968 and remains in place today, allowed Hollywood movies to be distributed without a PCA seal. Under this system, R- and X-rated domestic films could match the explicitness of the imports without upsetting Hollywood's older entertainment model, which was retained through G and PG fare. This change ushered in the New Hollywood, an art cinema that challenged the assumptions of the traditional usage of "foreign films." (Indeed, by 1972, Lolita might have asked Humbert whether he had seen any of those *American* films.) These changes would prove "a mixed blessing," as Balio puts it, for they reinforced what Elena Gorfinkel calls the "falling fortunes of the foreign film."<sup>168</sup> Hollywood's decision to return to thematic resources such as sex and violence that it hadn't really exploited since the silent era stripped foreign art-film producers of a crucial advantage. Foreign art films could still push the envelope, as Vilgot Sjöman's *I am Curious (Yellow)*, Just Jaeckin's *Emmanuelle*, and Pier Paolo Pasolini's *Salò* bore out on their American releases in 1969, 1974, and 1975. But they could do so only by enhancing their sexual explicitness or their violence, calling into question their difference from exploitation genres, including the emerging hardcore feature. This problem was only exacerbated by the fact that a large number of American films had, in the eyes of many, become full-fledged art films. No longer would eighty-percent of art-house offerings consist, as in

1958, of foreign films.<sup>169</sup> Thus, the term “foreign films” slowly lost its “cachet,” as Andrew Sarris notes, becoming a geographic classifier more than a cultural flashpoint.

### Extensions and Ramifications

I began this chapter by noting the importance of the English-speaking American market, which was at that time the most crucial market in the world due to the dominance of its domestic cinema as measured in box-office receipts and in global influence.<sup>170</sup> Not only could success in the U.S. lead producers to Hollywood riches, it could also lead to global recognition, as the Hollywood import-export machine has since the Second World War made a practice of absorbing the most successful foreign stars, auteurs, movies, and trends and re-circulating them, re-made, to the world through its extensive distribution network. This process, which was given new life in the postwar era, has spurred auteur “waves” and elevated marginalized national cinemas across the world. Most crucial to this process at the formal level were signs of national difference like language that could be “exoticized” along with exploitable elements like sex.<sup>171</sup>

However, under contemporary conditions, it is difficult to imagine that any future new wave could titillate the mature and segmented American market the way the Italian, Swedish, and French cinemas did sixty years ago—not that individual auteurs, from Peter Greenaway and Lars von Trier to Catherine Breillat and Gaspar Noé, haven’t been doing their best. (See Chapter Five.) The problem is that American audiences, including critics and journalists, are savvy to art-cinema codes, sex, and hype. Since the inception of the New Hollywood, American producers have used the same tactics, making them seem less exotic. And what has made contemporary Hollywood so stable is its ability to absorb and re-commodify stars and trends while sustaining its business in blockbuster entertainment.

In a global environment such as the U.S., innovations don't seem "foreign" for very long, reinforcing a blasé sense of "been there, done that." Though art cinema can still raise the profile of a national cinema, this process no longer seems capable of reforming the larger cinema environment by forcing change on Hollywood.

This is not to suggest that new national cinemas can't still extend art cinema's vast reach by spawning legitimate art cinemas in places like South Korea, whose cinema has elevated itself through the global circulation of acclaimed and reliably sexy auteur films, including Jang Sun-woo's *Lies* (1999), Kim Ki-duk's *The Isle* (2000), Lee Chang-dong's *Oasis* (2002), Park Chan-wook's *Sympathy for Mr. Vengeance* (2002), and Bong Joon-ho's *Memories of Murder* (2003). However, in the absence of broader cultural changes, these developments only add to the cinephile resignation that art cinema is just a genre that goes through the same auteurist motions everywhere, from Japan, India, and Germany to Denmark, Romania, and Israel. Still, I do not think that cinephiles should get too jaded here. The formation of new art cinemas through emergent new waves and through global processes of consecration has in fact remained crucial to the consolidation of national and regional identities, as demonstrated by the national cinemas of Iran, Taiwan, Scotland, Mexico, Argentina, and Nigeria as well as by the regional cinemas of the Catalan and Basque areas of Spain. Indeed, the case of Nollywood, the giant Nigerian video-making industry, is especially intriguing, for it fuses elements of a cult cinema with elements of a mainstream cinema and is currently in the earliest stages of developing a film-festival culture. It might even be possible, then, to discover a market environment where the internal dynamics are similar to that of the postwar U.S., where art cinema exploded with tremendous cultural and industrial power.

Still, as the case of Iran indicates, scholars should be careful in looking for such a place. Iran corresponds to the U.S. model in several respects. It has a distinguished film tradition despite the fact that its industrial sector has long been subject to censorship and other repressive constraints. In such a nation, even art films produced in Hollywood's fairly tame indie-style divisions might carry some of the threat that "foreign films" once carried in the U.S. However, this analogy is limited by the extent of Iranian control over movie production and distribution. Becker has noted the potential conflict between state control and the formation of art worlds.<sup>172</sup> Indeed, in countries such as Iran, China, and the former Soviet Union, there has been no guarantee that periods of openness would lead to expansions of artistic freedom among directors—for such nations have not been governed by the liberal laws that have over time expanded individual freedom and consumer choice in the west. This observation is most evident apropos Iran. Azadeh Farahmand has shown how the second Iranian New Wave that developed in 1983 and 1984 was pushed forward by a period of moderation in Iran's postrevolutionary climate during which the reformist Mohammad Khatami served first as minister of arts and culture and later as president. In that period, Iranian directors like Abbas Kiarostami were able to develop a recognizable style in movies like *Taste of Cherry* (1997) that compromised between the necessities of a moderate Iranian government and the tastes of a global festival circuit.<sup>173</sup> But this period in Iranian politics, which led to the creation of a domestic art cinema that was acclaimed as such at home and abroad,<sup>174</sup> did not lead to permanent changes—for in the absence of a liberal constitution that could consolidate and defend all the new freedoms, there was nothing to stop hardliners like Mahmoud Ahmadinejad from later tamping out creative expression.<sup>175</sup> Moreover, there has been no

persistent ambition among global distributors to penetrate this market, for the Iranian filmgoing audience has had at most a negligible impact on cinema's global economics. Movie distributors, then, have had neither the opportunity nor the incentive to trigger the changes in the Iranian market that distributors of European art cinemas triggered in the American market.

On the other hand, the potential of global art cinema to foment change can be seen through the work of a Chinese filmmaker such as Jia Zhangke. During the last decade, Jia became a state-sanctioned director in China. He first gained his auteur prestige from the popularity of films like *Platform* (2000) on the global festival circuit, which were hardly seen in mainland China except as underground films. But this “foreign” success led to his official acceptance by Chinese authorities. This arrangement allowed Jia more money for making films like *The World* (2004) and likewise allowed him to screen his work in more accessible venues. But the content of his films has not really changed: his focus remains the changes wrought by globalism and an accelerating consumerism in today's China, and his technique continues to show a mastery of many of the art-film conventions that animate the work of Hong Kong auteur Wong Kar-wai, including the fusion of a gritty realism with long, luxurious takes; slow, sweeping camera movements; considerable visual flash; and ambiguous narrative arcs. Jia's work still contains extensive cultural commentary, but the elliptical nature of that critique, along with the prestige that his films have generated through global festivals, has made his work acceptable to the authorities. If this kind of development becomes a trend among Chinese filmmakers, it would mark a shift from the tactics of Fifth Generation filmmakers like Zhang Yimou, who tended to avoid direct commentary on current events. In the long run, this trend could be a recipe

for industrial and cultural change—providing the Chinese authorities do not follow the Iranian model. To me, a similar roll-back seems unlikely, since China has shown signs of becoming a consumer-based economy that depends on imports as well as on exports.<sup>176</sup> (Indeed, this is the irony of Jia’s work: his cinema critiques the same consumerism that has carried it to more diverse Chinese audiences.) It seems more likely that the authorities will control the flow of change. But even if such change happens slowly, their cumulative effect on China could be huge, given the size of its market.

The elements that informed the changing usage of “foreign films” in the postwar U.S. are, then, liable to be rare. But as the case of China shows clearly, this rarity does not mean that we should stop looking for parallels within world cinemas. This scrutiny could help us distinguish between the business-as-usual manifestation of auteur cinemas in Asia, Europe, Africa, and the Americas and the more dramatic restructurings possible in places where the influence of the festival system on a crucial domestic cinema might signify an impending global wave, as occurred during the 1960s. This global wave seems most likely to be triggered through reforms in a huge developing power such as mainland China—whose potential audience and production capacity are so immense that they seem capable not of changing Hollywood but of marginalizing it.

### Enter “World Cinema”

According to Dudley Andrew, the “term ‘world cinema’ is now permanently with us.”<sup>177</sup> Though hyperbolic, this statement is correct in that “world cinema” has become an increasingly prominent classifier in academic classes and texts as well as in retail outlets, online and off. The term is also of interest to scholars of art cinema, for these cinematic categories are often conflated, especially on the festival circuit. As Andrew notes in his

oft-cited article “An Atlas of World Cinema” (2004), “world cinema” has replaced the term “foreign art film,” “which first slipped the heavily guarded university doors in the 1960s.”<sup>178</sup> One source of this convergence is the hint of the unfamiliar and exotic implicit in the term “world cinema,” which has made it yet another tool that teachers and retailers may use to distinguish Hollywood films from non-Hollywood films. Consequently, as Andrew notes, “world cinema” has even named “the resistance to Hollywood evident in the GATT debates over a decade ago.”<sup>179</sup> It is predictable, then, that this classifier has also become a focus of academic debates, much as we might expect of a xenophobic term like “foreign films” were it still a popular usage in the academy.

As it happens, the introduction of “world cinema” was part of the same dynamic that led to the obsolescence of “foreign films.” The utility of that term was that it divided the world into an “us” and a “them,” with the “us” often identified with English-speaking audiences, U.S. audiences in particular, and the “them” referring to an exotic, unfamiliar world that might be interesting for the “us” to see. But if this dynamic is unpalatable, it stands to reason that people have needed some variation on it to make distinctions among cinemas. Hence the utility of “world cinema.” This recent term seems to be a consumerist update of “foreign films,” one that reverses the old dynamic: it aligns the “us” with the “world,” making the marketing and study of world cinema more respectful and far less exploitative.<sup>180</sup> But as Stephanie Dennison and Song Hwee Lim note in *Remapping World Cinema* (2006), this is only one of two broad ways that “world cinema” has been used. The other way is to use the term to refer to “the sum total of all the national cinemas of the world,” making “world cinema” equivalent to “cinema.”<sup>181</sup>

To get a sense of what is at stake in the competition between these two usages, we should consider the criticism Andrew has taken from academic advocates of the latter usage. On first glance, Andrew is an unlikely target of criticism, given that he seems to consider even contemporary Hollywood a world cinema. This puts him in a decidedly progressive minority. If Andrew sees any cinema as the antithesis of world cinema, it is classical Hollywood cinema, which is long dead but well chronicled. Andrew's purpose in "An Atlas of World Cinema" is to arrive at better classroom uses of the term for teachers and students of global cinemas. Thus, for his syllabus, he promotes a "'world systems' approach" that is at once broad and specific.<sup>182</sup> The overarching strategy of his method is to understand cinematic change as interactive and endlessly reactive "waves" that travel not through clean lines of national descent but through very messy, always specific interminglings of influence, counterinfluence, and the like. Andrew's most particular tactic is to discern the world through its various localities, examining "every local cinema . . . with an eye to its complex ecology."<sup>183</sup>

Andrew's ideas for tweaking the use of "world cinema" sound good. So it is a bit surprising to find that this nuanced essay has met with criticism. For instance, Lúcia Nagib has made a case for rejecting any use of "world cinema" that relies on a distinction with Hollywood, even one that limits its scope to classical Hollywood—and she rightly notes that "the distinction between Hollywood and the rest of the world still reverberates" in Andrew's approach, despite its better attributes.<sup>184</sup> This leads Nagib to renew her call for a more inclusive usage with a truly "positive definition":

Despite its all-encompassing, democratic vocation, [world cinema] is not usually employed to mean cinema worldwide. On the contrary, the usual way of defining it is restrictive and negative, as "non-Hollywood cinema." Needless to say, negation here translates a positive intention to turn difference from the dominant

model into a virtue to be rescued from an unequal competition. However, it unwittingly sanctions the American way of looking at the world, according to which Hollywood is the centre and all other cinemas are the periphery.<sup>185</sup>

The problem that theorists sometimes have with “world cinema,” then, is that insofar as the term is used to make distinctions between Hollywood and “other,” it only *seems* to place non-Hollywood films at the core of cinema. For “world cinema” still fosters a patently hierarchical, unequal conception of the world of cinema that ironically implies that the cinemas it calls “the world” amount to the periphery.

In all of this, I agree with Nagib. “World cinema” sounds like a blanket term, and Hollywood is certainly part of that blanket. And I agree with Rosalind Galt and Karl Schoonover that the kind of usage Nagib rejects could refer to a “world of commodified and sanitized exoticism.”<sup>186</sup> But the spirit of Andrew’s essay is to agree with all this, too, for in it, the author moves away from what Nagib rightly considers a simplistic search for origins toward an idea of film history as a set of endlessly interactive waves.<sup>187</sup> Drawing on Andrew, Eleftheria Thanouli has made a significant contribution to this debate in her argument that the complexity of global flows, along with their incredible interdependence, asymmetrical or otherwise, make terms like “core,” “semi-periphery,” and “periphery” seem imprecise at best.<sup>188</sup> The real difference between these two sets of commentators is that Andrew, Thanouli, and other scholars such as Shohini Chaudhuri would like to use “world cinema” as a practical tool, for they believe that the term is destined to be around a while—and it is a term that, as Chaudhuri has put it, can help us “assert the importance of placing the national within the regional or global perspective.”<sup>189</sup> But Nagib for one seems to have no interest in using “world cinema” as a practical tool, as a term of convenience. Her usage has fascinating political and theoretical dimensions, but insofar

as it may be used as an egalitarian blanket term—“cinema” with a little “c”—it loses its value as a classifier for scholars, festival directors, and retail agents.

Nagib’s reservations would apply to one other use of “world cinema” as well. Such a usage deploys the term to refer to an emerging art cinema, one whose presence at festivals helps it function as a potential new wave or national cinema, that is, as an unconsecrated art cinema.<sup>190</sup> This usage also depends on distinctions between Hollywood and non-Hollywood cinemas and on equally thorny distinctions between traditional and untraditional production contexts. Because the latter distinctions carry hints of “inferior” cultural status, they will seem most inflammatory if applied in an insensitive way to art cinemas emerging from milieus outside the traditional colonial powers in Europe, Asia, Africa, and the Americas. On the other hand, this use of the term would be fine if it were accompanied by precision, respect, and a clear understanding of art cinema. After all, theorists of art cinema cannot simply reject the value-oriented workings of art cinema—for whether we like it or not, art cinema relies on (sub)cultural hierarchy everywhere. It cannot exist without aspiration and distinction and all the value-added components that ruffle feathers. But those who want to use “world cinema” can avoid ethnocentrism by analyzing art cinema clearly and by always looking across its breathtaking diversity. In that way, their usage won’t reinforce art-cinema ideology naïvely.

“Foreign films” fell out of use for two reasons. It exhausted its market value; and once that value was all gone, there was no reason to retain an ethnocentric term that was out of step with the multicultural, *multiculturalist* drift of the liberal globalism that had allowed foreign films to come ashore in the U.S. in the first place. But as a context-reliant classifier, the term had its uses, so it is logical that “world cinema” arrived to replace it,

updating the older term in accord with a more postcolonial climate. Still, because “world cinema” was still a *classifying* tool, it could never be correct in the eyes of academics who find classification itself problematic. So it is predictable that the debate around the term has threatened to empty it of the very functions that it was adapted to fulfill—which would presumably lead to ever-more correct terms to fill the same functions as “world cinema” and “foreign films” before it. We can only wait and wonder whether this process will be subverted when, or if, other developing cinemas like that of mainland China grow large enough to dwarf Hollywood through their economic heft.

### Concluding Précis

Three conditions were crucial to the postwar meaning of “foreign films” in the U.S. The first was the existence of a broad, middle-class society dubious of art and sex. This society enforced its norms through censorship. The second was a liberal capitalist system that corroded distribution barriers, aspiring to the free flow of goods, ideas, and capital. One of this system’s profit centers was the idea that art was sacred; this belief was legally protected though it did not always match mainstream sentiment. The third condition—and the hardest to replicate abroad—was the existence of a domestic movie industry that was so dominant that it could afford to be conservative, regulating its films so that they matched the values of its domestic audience.

This situation could not last, for the society’s liberal laws could be used to smash the constraints (censorship boards, monopolies, etc.) that created it. Once the constraints were removed, distributors brought in increasingly liberated imports. At first, the foreign films inspired dread and desire in the new audience. But the films’ notorious combination of art and sex proved adaptive, helping them circulate; at that point, their status as sacred

Art was crucial to cultural defenses of their sex content. But soon, so many of these films were in circulation that this mystification was no longer necessary to their flow. As the years passed, the society that once seemed repressive came to seem permissive, leaving the domestic industry out of step. It had to adapt or die; it had to revise its internal rules to mimic the success of the imports. These changes were made easier by the success of the imports—for, to paraphrase Baumann, it was the very idea that foreign films could be art that later made it possible to think of domestic films as art.<sup>191</sup> This reformation of the global hegemon reduced the foreigners' advantage and altered the meaning of "foreign films" until the term no longer inspired the dread it once had.

The foreign films never went away. But the encounter with "the other" that they occasioned led many citizens to see that there was nothing to justify the exoticism linked to the term "foreign films." Thus, a classifying term that had lost its economic value was outmoded terminologically by the same liberal processes that had brought it into being in the first place. Still, academics and cinephiles needed a term to distinguish among various kinds of cinema. In time, this necessity led to the ascendancy of "world cinema," a term that reversed the orientation of "foreign films" by identifying "the foreign" with "the world." Eventually, the most progressive segments of the new global culture found fault with this term as well. Some academics didn't like the fact that it was a *classifier* that could still be used to make distinctions between Hollywood and non-Hollywood cinemas or between emerging, unconsecrated, "peripheral" art cinemas and well-established, consecrated, "core" art cinemas. Thus, the newly global citizens faced a choice: would they continue abandoning useful terminological tools in the interest of progressive

politics, or would they invent a flexible, respectful, fully contextualized way out of an impasse created and exacerbated by cultural liberalism?

This author chose the second option.

## Part Two

### *Formats and Fetishes*

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149

#### NOTES TO CHAPTER FIVE

<sup>149</sup> Andrew Sarris, "Why the Foreign Film Has Lost Its Cachet," *New York Times*, May 2, 1999: 1 p. Available at <<http://www.nytimes.com/1999/05/02/movies/summer-films-international-why-the-foreign-film-has-lost-its-cachet.html>>. Accessed January 6, 2011.

150

<sup>150</sup> Jack Stevenson, "And God Created Europe: How the European Sexual Myth Was Created and Sold to Post-War American Movie Audiences," *Fleshpot: Cinema's Sexual Myth Makers and Taboo Breakers*, ed. Jack Stevenson (Manchester: Critical Vision, 2002), p. 8.

<sup>151</sup> See Barbara Wilinsky, *Sure Seaters: The Emergence of Art House Cinema* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2001), p. 31.

<sup>152</sup> Sarris, "Why the Foreign Film Has Lost its Cachet," p. 1.

<sup>153</sup> See David Andrews, *Soft in the Middle: The Contemporary Softcore Feature in its Contexts* (Columbus: Ohio State University Press, 2006), pp. 35-36.

<sup>154</sup> Eric Schaefer, *"Bold! Daring! Shocking! True!": A History of Exploitation Films, 1919-1959* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1999), p. 332.

<sup>155</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 333.

<sup>156</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 334. See also Stevenson, "And God Created Europe."

<sup>157</sup> Balio, *Foreign Film Renaissance*, p. 8. See also Mark Betz, "Art, exploitation, underground," *Defining Cult Movies*, ed. Mark Jancovich et al. (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2003), pp. 205-210, and Schaefer, "*Bold, Daring, Shocking, True!*," pp. 334-335.

<sup>158</sup>

Quoted in Schaefer, "*Bold, Daring, Shocking, True!*," p. 336.

<sup>159</sup> Quoted in Wilinsky, *Sure Seaters*, p. 37.

<sup>160</sup> Schaefer, "*Bold, Daring, Shocking, True!*," p. 335.

<sup>161</sup> See Peter Lev, *The Euro-American Cinema* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1993), p. 13.

<sup>162</sup> Quoted in Schaefer, "*Bold, Daring, Shocking, True!*," p. 335. To see how this chain of influence and counter-influence works, we should consider that the "beautiful and disturbing" nudity in Machatý's *Ecstasy* was by Bergman's admission an influence on his own work. See Ingmar Bergman, *Bergman on Bergman: Interviews with Ingmar Bergman by Stig Björkman, Torsten Manns, Jonas Sima* (1970), tran. Paul Britten Austin (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1973), p. 138.

<sup>163</sup> Lev, *The Euro-American Cinema*, p. 13.

<sup>164</sup> Howard Becker, *Art Worlds* (1982; Berkeley: University of California Press, 2008), p. 39.

<sup>165</sup> Shyon Baumann, *Hollywood Highbrow: From Entertainment to Art* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2007), p. 22.

<sup>166</sup> Schaefer, "*Bold, Daring, Shocking, True!*," p. 336.

<sup>167</sup> Baumann, *Hollywood Highbrow*, p. 103. This trend was particularly pronounced in the case of *Et Dieu... créa la femme*, which Columbia managed to distribute in the U.S. by acquiring Kingsley-International; a later high-profile case was the acquisition of Lopert Pictures by United Artists. See Balio, *Foreign Film Renaissance*, pp. 44, 114-116.

<sup>168</sup> Balio, *Foreign Film Renaissance*, p. 95, and Elena Gorfinkel, "Radley Metzger's 'Elegant Arousal': Taste, Aesthetic Distinction and Sexploitation," *Underground U.S.A.: Filmmaking Beyond the Hollywood Canon*, ed. Xavier Mendik and Steven Jay Schneider (London: Wallflower, 2002), p. 38. See also Wilinsky, *Sure Seaters*, pp. 132-138.

<sup>169</sup> See Wilinsky, *Sure Seaters*, pp. 30-31. This process has continued through today, when American "indie" films still perform "the social functions previously performed by foreign art films." Michael Newman, *Indie: An American Film Culture* (New York: Columbia, 2011), p. 2.

<sup>170</sup> The American audience was also useful because it provided such a diverse testing ground for the film industry. If a movie could please viewers across its regional and ethnic differences, it was more likely that that movie could also please viewers across the world. For more, see Eletheria Thanouli, Eletheria Thanouli, "Narration in World cinema: Mapping the flows of formal exchange in the era of globalization," *New Cinemas: Journal of Contemporary Film*, vol. 6, no. 1 (2008), p. 7.

<sup>171</sup>

The most common difference is language, with English the Hollywood default. This has led to the class-conscious practice of subtitling foreign films for art-house consumption and dubbing them into English for mass audiences, if the film has exploitation potential. (For insights on subtitling and dubbing, see Mark Betz's essay "The Name above the (Sub)Title: Internationalism, Coproduction, and Polyglot European Art Cinema," *Camera Obscura*, vol. 16 [2001], pp. 2-5.) But since the audience has most often been viewed from an American perspective, the national or regional accents of Australian, South African, Scottish, Irish, British, and Canadian locales can also serve as signs of difference, especially if other types of difference are present. It is still possible, then, to make a competitive low- to medium-budget foreign-art film by "exoticizing" these signs of difference through an accessible blend of outré eroticism and high-art stylistics.

<sup>172</sup> Becker, *Art Worlds*, pp. 39, 107.

<sup>173</sup> Azadeh Farahmand, "Disentangling the International Festival Circuit: Genre and Iranian Cinema," *Global Art Cinema: New Theories and Histories* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010), pp. 272-276.

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<sup>174</sup> Ibid., p. 275.

<sup>175</sup> Ibid., p. 277. One of the most searing images of the 1979 Revolution was that of crowds burning down cinemas—so the fact that filmmakers like Mohsen Makhmalbaf and Jafar Panahi were prominent in the Iranian protest movement of 2009 and 2010 had tremendous resonance.

<sup>176</sup> But if unlikely, such a roll-back is hardly impossible. After all, directors like Jiang Wen, who was banned from filmmaking for seven years after finishing his festival-decorated war comedy *Devils on the Doorstep* (2000), still routinely face censure.

<sup>177</sup> Dudley Andrew, “An Atlas of World Cinema” (2004), *Remapping World Cinema: Identity, Culture, and Politics in Film*, ed. Stephanie Dennison and Song Hwee Lim (London: Wallflower, 2006), p. 19.

<sup>178</sup> Ibid.

<sup>179</sup> Ibid.

<sup>180</sup> This is the sort of definition at work in Linda Badley and R. Barton Palmer, “Introduction,” *Traditions in World Cinema*, ed. Linda Badley, R. Barton Palmer, and Steven Jay Schneider (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 2006), pp. 1-12 (see pp. 1-3).

<sup>181</sup>

Stephanie Dennison and Song Hwee Lim, “Introduction: Situating World Cinema as a Theoretical Problem,” *Remapping World Cinema: Identity, Culture, and Politics in Film*, ed. Stephanie Dennison and Song Hwee Lim (London: Wallflower, 2006), p. 6.

<sup>182</sup> Andrew, “An Atlas of World Cinema,” p. 21.

<sup>183</sup> Ibid., p. 19.

<sup>184</sup> Lúcia Nagib, “Towards a Positive Definition of World Cinema,” *Remapping World Cinema: Identity, Culture, and Politics in Film*, ed. Stephanie Dennison and Song Hwee Lim (London: Wallflower, 2006), p. 33.

<sup>185</sup> Ibid., p. 30. See Eleftheria Thanouli, “Narration in World cinema,” pp. 13-14, for another critique of Andrew.

<sup>186</sup> Rosalind Galt and Karl Schoonover, “Introduction: The Impurity of Art Cinema,” *Global Art Cinema: New Theories and Histories*, ed. Rosalind Galt and Karl Schoonover (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010), p. 11. At the same time, Galt and Schoonover note here that “world cinema” could also refer to an “emerging scholarly discourse of world cinema in which ‘world’ does not mean the whole world but those areas outside of Europe and North America.”

<sup>187</sup> Nagib calls for “a method in which Hollywood and the West would cease to be the centre of film history, and this would be seen as a process with no single beginning,” a demand that is in keeping with her larger view of “world cinema” as “the cinema of the world. It has no centre. It is not the other, but is us . . . World cinema, as the world itself, is circulation.” Ibid., pp. 34-35.

<sup>188</sup>

See Eleftheria Thanouli, “Narration in World cinema: Mapping the flows of formal exchange in the era of globalization,” *New Cinemas: Journal of Contemporary Film*, vol. 6, no. 1 (2008), pp. 7, 13-14.

<sup>189</sup>

Shohini Chaudhuri, *Contemporary World Cinema: Europe, the Middle East, East Asia, and South Asia*. (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2005), p. 1; see pp. 1-5.

<sup>190</sup>

See, e.g., the description of the Society for Cinema and Media Studies workshop proposed at <[http://www.cmstudies.org/index.php?option=com\\_content&task=view&id=1408&Itemid=138](http://www.cmstudies.org/index.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=1408&Itemid=138)>. Accessed July 14, 2010. This description suggests that “world cinema” may be defined as a group of “emerging national cinemas and international co-production modes.” Another way of thinking of this term is through older, more explicitly racist terms like “ethnic cinema” or “ethnic film.” As Barbara Wilinsky has noted, in the postwar period, Mexican films had trouble achieving the status of art films in the U.S. Instead, they were often relegated to the lower cultural status of “ethnic films” instead. Using our new view

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of the term “world cinema,” we can see that these Mexican films formed a world cinema in the U.S. that were struggling, and often failing, to achieve the status of an art cinema so that they could take advantage of higher-class screenings, venues, and audiences. See Wilinsky, *Sure Seaters*, p. 32.

191

Baumann, *Hollywood Highbrow*, p. 113.

## Chapter Five / Recovery and Legitimation in the Traditional Art Film

Which art-movie format is now truest to art cinema’s most legendary function, the legitimation of cinema as a high art? This is a question I seem destined to return to, for the answers that once tempted me—including both cult art cinema and mainstream art cinema—now look imprecise. On the one hand, the films and auteurs of these illegitimate and quasi-legitimate formats are quite popular today with audiences across a range of cultural strata—and the legitimation of these formats as high art could validate whole areas, just as the legitimation of classic art films did in the auteur era of 1945 to 1970. But these answers are unsatisfying now because it seems unlikely that such untraditional formats could, by themselves, gain cultural legitimacy as *areas* anytime soon. After all, what legitimacy has been secured in these formats has been won by individuals and films as sanctified by film critics whose authority is an institutional function of the authority of traditional formats, like the art film or avant-garde movie.

Of course, as we will see in later chapters, cult cinema and mainstream cinema do have their own specialized art cinemas, which they have generated internally. But to gain a wider legitimacy, individuals and works in these cinemas have typically had to secure some stamp of approval from more “official” institutions, like those linked to the art film. In other words, through its institutions, the movie format that I call “the traditional art

film” has always served as art cinema’s legitimation machine. Illegitimate and quasi-legitimate art cinemas can achieve *subcultural* legitimacy on their own, but most often they work through art-film institutions to gain a broader *cultural* legitimacy. These processes have made the traditional art film a dynamic art-cinema format, one that is more than capable of absorbing the most innovative and untraditional forms. But they have also made it a resilient, status-quo format, one that from the outside seems obsessed with its own cultural traditions, its own cultural institutions, its own cultural status. For these mechanisms to change, western culture would have to alter the way that it perceives the “lower” cinemas and, perhaps, the way that it perceives art itself—neither of which is happening in any organized fashion at the current moment.

Indeed, the authority of the art film is today so encompassing that few cinephiles seem to know that it is just one of several art-movie formats offered by contemporary cinema. To understand the power of its aura, we should reflect on the nature of the art film and consider how it has, throughout its postwar history, operated as a legitimation machine capable of recovering comparatively debased movies, auteurs, and materials. I begin this process by suggesting that traditional art films do not need to be praised or even *liked* to be thought legitimate; this legitimacy is instead a function of their art-film provenance, including their initial distribution channels and modes of exhibition. I then take a separate approach by looking at the squabbling over authenticity that is now so characteristic around American independent cinema, a sector that has made art films, including *Hollywood* art films. Finally, we can examine the art film as a recovery and legitimation machine by looking at the way in which it has, over its history, found ways to smuggle contents once deemed *déclassé* or obscene into “respectable” culture. By

exercising its “free pass,” the art film has used predictable contents to market itself as provocative, as risqué—and lately, it has backed up these claims by using unsimulated sexual imagery in its *mise en scène*. This market freedom may not be what most of us imagine when we think of artistic freedom, but there is a link between it and the more familiar kind of artistic freedom, which acts as its rationale. Thus, a culturally celebrated *idea* of artistic freedom has helped movies labeled “art films” navigate markets, allowing art cinema to remain a competitive cinematic category over time.

### What Is a “Traditional Art Film?”

One problem that we should address at the outset is the fact that the art-movie format that I call “the traditional art film” throughout this book is only *comparatively* traditional. In fact, what makes this type of film “traditional” is not its country of origin or its stylistic palette or its method of production or its position in film studies but rather its eligibility for distribution through the main institutions allied with the global festival circuit as they were established in the postwar period and continue to flourish today. By defining the “traditional art film” as a feature-length art movie geared to this distribution circuit—while leaving other details open—we can distinguish this art-movie format from less traditional areas, like avant-garde cinema, cult art cinema, and most mainstream art cinemas, without devolving into arguments over authenticity.

That said, this notion of the art film is clearly *untraditional* in one respect: it does not define the art film as a foreign film that came to the U.S. from Europe in the quarter century after the Second World War. Particularly in the U.S., this is the most traditional idea of the “art film,” and as such, it continues to crop up even in remarkable studies like Tino Balio’s *The Foreign Film Renaissance on American Screens, 1946-1973* (2010) and

Michael Z. Newman's *Indie: An American Film Culture* (2011). There are, however, several problems with restricting the art film to this classic phase. First, it is ethnocentric in a self-limiting way: it not only looks at art films through American eyes, it also denies American projects any possibility of art-film status. The core problem with this kind of definition is, then, that it sees "artfilmness" as belonging to certain kinds of movies rather than to certain kinds of institutions and social dynamics. I believe that art-film status is a sociological function of particular kinds of movie distribution and reception. If we fail to insist on this, we might settle for the conclusion that Newman settles for, which is to say that American indie films fill the same functions and niches that foreign films once filled in the U.S. while never quite qualifying as "art films"—because that category is not open to indie films, especially those with links to Hollywood.<sup>192</sup> To me, this is an academic idea of the art film, one that overstresses categorical consistency and projects a misguided idea of historical closure. The history of the art film is not closed.

Which is not to deny that the feature-length art film has crucial roots in Europe. The explosive postwar expansion of this format was first stimulated by Hollywood's domination of the global film industry after the First World War and then by its effort to reclaim that hegemony after the Second World War. The more impecunious European film industries countered Hollywood domination with an art strategy. This strategy was of vital importance because the art-film format could not have matured without the social processes that allowed increasing masses of people to identify film as a potential high art. As Andrew Tudor sees it, the film-as-art idea was first created by the same people who shepherded "art" audiences.<sup>193</sup> These promoters included writers like Ricciotto Canudo, who encouraged the art-house movement in France in the early 1920s, and impresarios

like Ivor Montagu, who helped found the Film Society in Britain in 1925. Moreover, throughout the interwar period, an emerging art-house circuit in the U.S. contested Hollywood's "vertical" monopolization of domestic distribution and exhibition. This alternative circuit included museum theaters like that of the Museum of Modern Art as well as little cinemas, university theaters, repertory theaters, exploitation theaters, and film clubs.<sup>194</sup> Here, American viewers could witness experimental art films from Germany, France, and Russia, like *Des cabinet des Dr. Caligari* (1919). After the Second World War, this art-house audience could attend movies previously feted at European festivals, including the prestigious international events at Venice and Cannes. According to Shyon Baumann, such developments increasingly broadened the perception of the movies as a legitimate art.<sup>195</sup> Baumann contends that before the Second World War and immediately after it, cinema was seen as a form of high art only in certain European nations, including France and Italy—where cultural and industrial conditions were very different from those in the U.S.—and in the pages of avant-garde film journals.<sup>196</sup>

But as the postwar era proceeded, the art-world developments noted above were reinforced and duplicated in many places, the European film industry most particularly. As a result, the perception of film as a potential high art became more mainstream and by the late 1960s and throughout the 1970s could even be applied to Hollywood. After the Second World War, producers in the main European art-film-producing nations, aided by state subsidies, all but ceded their mainstream "mass" markets to Hollywood, opting to compete through a niche "art" strategy that provided prestige and global distribution but never the most profits.<sup>197</sup> As the postwar era progressed, this strategy became more reliable as European producers honed their tactics and secured fresh distribution

advantages in the U.S. through an array of Supreme Court rulings that broke up Hollywood's vertical integration and that gave the cinema free-speech protections. These phenomena were reinforced by the popularity of auteurism as publicized by *la politique des auteurs* of the *Cahiers du cinéma* critics, which Andrew Sarris later translated and expanded into the auteur theory for English speakers. Together, these trends contributed to the decline of the classical studio system, compelling Hollywood to embrace auteurist practices even before the advent of the New Hollywood. Indeed, Baumann has argued that the New Hollywood was able to have its films accepted as art because European developments had already created paradigms like auteurism for viewing cinema as high art, paradigms audiences were later encouraged to apply to Hollywood.<sup>198</sup>

As I noted in the previous chapter, one crucial factor in this change in cultural perceptions was the eroticism of classic art films. The tendency of distributors to exploit the sexuality, real or imagined, of postwar art films began in the U.S. with the Italian neorealist films and remained steady thereafter. This tendency was rooted in the fact that classical Hollywood had, through the Production Code, barred itself from producing or exhibiting explicit images in the theaters it controlled. Consequently, European directors and American promoters learned to exploit this cultural and industrial difference to the benefit of consumers who attended the alternative circuits where foreign art films were popularized. Indeed, in the U.S., these art films were often marketed and exhibited as exploitation, with even tame movies such as Ingmar Bergman's Swedish production of *Sommaren med Monika* (1953) retitled as *Monika, the Story of a Bad Girl* to accentuate its sexual imagery.<sup>199</sup> Though this doctoring, which included dubbing and visual inserts, has historically enraged cinephiles,<sup>200</sup> it clearly furthered the market penetration necessary

to familiarize Americans with the art-film concept, hastening the cultural process noted by Baumann. Seen in this light, actresses such as Hedy Lamarr (*Ecstasy* [1933]), Harriet Andersson (*Monika*), and especially Brigitte Bardot (*Et Dieu...créa la femme* [1956] and *Le mépris* [1963]) did as much as any auteur to popularize the film-as-high-art idea in the U.S.<sup>201</sup> Given all this tradition and utility, it is no wonder that the traditional art film has remained a sexualized format (about which, more anon).

But the most crucial factor in the longterm success of the art-film format has been the film festivals that proliferated in the postwar era. These festivals have functioned as value generators, testing grounds, marketing points, and sources of legal protection for art films. Since the Cannes International Film Festival began giving out awards in 1946, the festival circuit has grown explosively all across the globe.<sup>202</sup> Art films have often had their preliminary exposure on this circuit, earning wider release to art-houses and multiplexes by winning a distribution deal, preferably at a major festival.

Festival mechanics explain why a traditional art film has not needed to depend on audience praise for its legitimation. Getting past festival gatekeepers at Cannes, Venice, Berlin, Sundance, Toronto, or Pusan can be competitive, arduous, and costly, especially if a film's producers are of more-or-less independent means. But once a movie has achieved art-film exposure through hierarchical art-film institutions—institutions that in effect secured their own legitimacy *en masse* during the postwar era, when the change in the perception of cinema noted by Baumann gained mainstream acceptance in Europe—it does not *require* more praise to prove that it is a “real” art film. For many critics, the tag “art film” simply means “high-quality movie,” and it is the festival system—along with a number of narrower value generators, like award nights, specialized distribution labels, or

auteur branding—that verifies the quality. This is the secret, I think, of the “free pass,” or special permission, that the format has had in the U.S. and abroad: the art film’s seal of quality allows it to arrive on screen with a value-added character that indicates that it has already been approved by sophisticated audiences. This hands distributors an alibi for picking up even notorious art films, which in many contexts would have had little hope of getting distribution if they didn’t have high-art credentials in tow. Ergo, when distributors attend a festival, they are for the most part free to look for art films they believe will have audience appeal, since the credentials of the films are assured.

### Status and Legitimation in the Traditional Art Film

Today, the traditional art film is at the top of the cinema hierarchy, such that it is the only type of art movie that qualifies as high art in all contexts just by being itself. Not even the cultural capital of the experimental art movie is equally useful, for avant-garde prestige is subcultural, valued mainly in avant-garde communities and in elite institutions like the art world or the academy. By contrast, the prestige of the art film is so expansive that we might say that it is “always already” consecrated, for once it has been identified as an art film, its status is culturally—and legally—understood. This has not always been the case. As noted, the art film is still young—especially in the U.S., where Hollywood’s traditional identification of the movies as “entertainment” has served as a counterweight to the movie-as-high-art idea. To get a sense of all that is at stake here, we should look at the American reception of two historically distant art films, Louis Malle’s *Les amants* (1958) and Vincent Gallo’s *The Brown Bunny* (2003). The very different responses to these art films show how effective the change in American perceptions of the movies has been at moderating cultural responses to sexualized art films.

Malle's art film arrived in the U.S. after the auteur era had commenced but while the institutions of the art film were still in the process of validating the artistic potential of the cinema. So even though the film was decorated by these institutions—after all, Malle was a respected French auteur who won the Special Jury Prize for *Les amants* at Venice in 1958—it was too early in the U.S.'s cultural history for these institutional credentials to prevent the brouhaha that erupted after the film was exhibited in Cleveland Heights in November 1959. The problem, of course, was the film's erotic trajectory, which ended with a protracted sex sequence featuring an undraped Jean Moreau. Given that the theater owner, Nico Jacobellis, was fined for obscenity just for showing this film, its status as art was clearly still subject to legal dispute, despite the fact that the Supreme Court had in *Burstyn v. Wilson* (1952) designated *all* movies as forms of art that deserved free-speech protections. Thus, the defenders of *Les amants* marshaled its cultural credentials so as to corroborate that it had been produced with the intention of making art, not the intention of making obscenity. In *Jacobellis v. Ohio* (1964), the Court accepted these and other arguments, reversing the fine through a decision made famous by Justice Potter Stewart's "I know it when I see it" obscenity standard.<sup>203</sup> Though the sex in Malle's movie may now seem timid, the film had a definite cultural impact on the format, protecting the status of other art films even as it added to their marketable notoriety.

After the 1960s, art films that caused a stir in the U.S. rarely had to do more than show off their institutional credentials to ward off threats to their circulation. This was in part a result of the fact that in the 1960s and 1970s hardcore and softcore pornographic movies were gaining public traction in the U.S.—creating a sense of their difference from traditional art films. This institutional difference was a salient reality regardless of the

quality of a given art film according to critics—and regardless of whether the film seemed to exploit its freedom. Here Gallo's indie art film *The Brown Bunny* offers a case in point. Having made the respected indie film *Buffalo '66* (1998) with an auteurist slant, Gallo amplified this aspect of *The Brown Bunny*, crediting himself for all significant production roles (including directing, writing, producing, starring, editing, and filming) as well as for roles that weren't so significant (such as make-up design). In that sense, then, *The Brown Bunny* would prove even more auteurist than *Les amants*, approaching the “artisan” ideal characteristic of avant-garde cinema. And *The Brown Bunny* had the same sort of credentials as *Les amants*. It had been released to art houses after being nominated for awards at festivals like Cannes. Indeed, at the Vienna International Film Festival, *The Brown Bunny* won a FIPRESCI Prize. The festival cited the film for “its bold exploration of yearning and grief and for its radical departure from dominant tendencies in current American filmmaking.”<sup>204</sup>

Despite these impressive credentials, *The Brown Bunny* is today recalled for two things: its concluding sex scene, wherein Chloë Sevigny fellates Gallo on camera, and its reputation for bad aesthetics. The latter was precipitated by the catcalls that the film received at its Cannes premiere and was reinforced when Roger Ebert called it the worst film in the history of Cannes, precipitating a nasty row between critic and auteur. *The Brown Bunny*'s cult legacy as “badfilm” lives on in the message boards of the Internet Movie Database, which includes categories like “bad movie” and “TOO BAD no taste.”<sup>205</sup> But the controversies that have surrounded the movie, unlike those that once surrounded *Les amants*, have never caused experts to question its status as an indie art film. No matter how gratuitous viewers judge its fellatio sequence or how tedious critics

consider its pacing, no one has ever denied that it is an indie art film, simply because *The Brown Bunny* conforms to too many traditions of the format: e.g., it was independently funded; it was shot on 16mm by an auteur who has made other art films and has starred in art films by auteurs like Claire Denis and Francis Ford Coppola; and it was blown up to 35mm for art houses and festivals. Today, even the debates about its sex reinforce its art-film status rather than interrogating it, as was true of *Les amants*.

On the other hand, art movies that have been made by less traditional auteurs or that have arrived on the American stage through less traditional channels have long had to win their art-film status by winning over audiences and critics. In effect, this process exemplifies what Howard Becker, a sociologist of art, once said about distribution: i.e., that it “has a crucial effect on [the] reputations” of artists and art works. We can see this borne out through the example of movies such as Joe Sarno’s *Inga* and Radley Metzger’s *Therese and Isabelle*, which in the late 1960s crossed over from sexploitation theaters to mainstream art theaters on the basis of their strong, female-oriented narratives, their deflective aesthetics, and their docile sex appeal. Nevertheless, the fact that these movies came from the exploitation circuit and were made by auteurs who later produced hard- and softcore pornography has served to relegate these films to a quasi-legitimate cult-art status. Indeed, some gatekeepers have gotten very personal in arguing for the prohibition of any legitimate recognition for these art movies. Thus, in a long *Spectator* article, Bart Testa has argued against rehabilitating Metzger’s reputation, contending that this auteur of classical sexploitation was a mercenary and a “charlatan,” an “interloper” whose “critical recuperation should [not] be sought.”<sup>206</sup> That said, we should not forget that these art movies *did* resemble the traditional art films of their time even if they have not

been accepted as such. They were consigned to less-than-legitimate status, then, not by their texts but by their contexts: who made them and how; where they played and competed; and what, if anything, they won. Today, if a film fulfills the institutional criteria of the art film, as *The Brown Bunny* did, it seems absurd to deny its legitimacy, no matter how bad or exploitative it strikes us. But if a film is of illegitimate “cult” origins, it can secure its legitimacy only by winning praise from juries, critics, distributors, and audiences. The problem of *Inga* and *Therese and Isabelle*, then, is not that they were that bad but that they didn’t generate sufficient acclaim to overcome their origin.

### Problems of the Term “Independent”

It has become something of a cliché to note that most independent art films—like those produced by the American independent cinema, which is to many observers a clear example of an art cinema<sup>207</sup>—are only *relatively* independent.<sup>208</sup> As has often been pointed out, a strict construction of the term “independent film” would require that it be produced and distributed without any “corporate” funds,<sup>209</sup> much as Jarmusch financed his realist indie classic *Stranger than Paradise* (1984). Still, the vagaries of cinematic production and exhibition are rarely strict. Thus, indie producers have routinely turned out to be only *comparatively* independent, accepting studio funding through a variety of means, from co-production monies to cushy distribution deals. The contradictions implicit in these arrangements are only exacerbated when Hollywood studios buy formerly independent studios, as when Disney bought the legendary independent Miramax in 1993 and tried to maintain its cred inside Hollywood, or when they start indie-style studios of their own, like Fox Searchlight or Sony Pictures Classics, which call themselves “autonomous” divisions. This practice has led to the ritual denunciation

of these independent films as “inauthentic.” Thus cinephiles have often complained in crossover magazines such as *Sight & Sound* that a term that “should refer to films produced without studio support” has been applied instead to what are really “genre” vehicles:

These subdivisions may offer more directorial control, but it appears they also supply a full crew and enough money to afford major acting talents, music licensing and inescapable mass marketing. With this studio background and their trademark “quirkiness,” one can’t help but find these “indies” to be as shallow and money-hungry as their bigger-budget, high-concept counterparts.<sup>210</sup>

Given how common this viewpoint is in art-film circles, one would expect that the recent economic downturn, which led Hollywood to pull back from this minimally profitable area by closing or reining in several indie-style divisions, would have been greeted with open arms by cinephiles. But that has not been the case. Many cinephiles have instead acted as if the sky is falling, with Hollywood, that all-purpose bogeyman, once again being blamed for producing or acquiring too few art films.<sup>211</sup> Clearly, Hollywood can only rarely please cinephiles, many of whom despise it by reflex.

But the debates over “independent” miss a bigger historical point. Whether or not cinephiles approve of its films, Hollywood has been making and distributing traditional art films since the 1950s, having gotten into the business even before the New Hollywood era. Today, indie-style films may be independent in name only; nonetheless, they still circulate at the festivals for which they were made and where they often win awards that boost them in their later release to art houses and multiplexes. They are, then, *Hollywood art films*, maintaining dual status as traditional art films and as mainstream art movies. This is no dark conspiracy, though, for the festival system and the various critical bodies that are the guarantor of the art film’s authority have never banned Hollywood from their events and competitions. Indeed, as the current recession has demonstrated, many art-film

insiders profoundly *want* Hollywood to participate in this format, for they understand that Hollywood financing and distribution offer art-film auteurs and art-film fans unparalleled opportunities for exposure and access. Of course, the Hollywood studios have gotten a number of things in return for their investments, including a qualified status in a category that is prestigious all over the world. But the fact that Hollywood has *any* status in the institutions of the traditional art film is remarkable, for as I have noted, the art film first coalesced as a format in apparent opposition to Hollywood. What the presence of the Hollywood art film in the institutions of the traditional art film proves, then, is that those institutions are, as legitimization machines, very powerful and supple, capable of extending their prestige even to entities they nominally oppose.

Another way in which the current emphasis on the authenticity of the independent art film misses the point is through its American focus. Obviously, I am sensitive to this because I am American. But it does seem odd that critics feel free to criticize American art films for lacking independence when European and Asian art films have also gotten help from Hollywood as well as from behemoths like the French studios Pathé, Gaumont, and StudioCanal or top-down funding schemes such as public subsidies, tax incentives, co-production agreements, and festival grants like the Hubert Bals Fund. Pierre Bourdieu notes that the latter type of funding subjects artists to “hidden censorship,” demonstrating that the freedom of European art films has always been relative.<sup>212</sup> This point is borne out by the many articles (e.g., Azadeh Farahmand’s “Disentangling the International Festival Circuit: Genre and Iranian Cinema” [2010] and Randall Halle’s “Offering Tales They Want to Hear: Transnational European Film Funding as Neo-Orientalism” [2010]) that show how funding and distribution influence film form.<sup>213</sup>

Similarly, Mark Betz, Peter Lev, and Tino Balio have drawn on Thomas Guback to show that classic art films that were nominally European in production, attitude, and style were funded through Hollywood.<sup>214</sup> Such funding was part of Hollywood's emerging global strategy, which in the 1960s had Hollywood providing all or part of the budgets for sixty-percent of British features, according to Lev and Guback.<sup>215</sup> Where their joint funding has come to light, these Euro-American co-productions have been "relegated," as Betz puts it, "to the despised zone of European popular cinema, wherein *popular* signifies a commercial betrayal of national traditions."<sup>216</sup> Betz notes how this critical devaluation has affected the reputations of films like *Blow-Up* (1966), *Zabriskie Point* (1969), and *The Passenger* (1975), which were financed in part by Metro-Goldwyn Mayer. But he also wonders why director Michelangelo Antonioni's three previous films didn't suffer similarly.<sup>217</sup> Betz is referring to that trilogy of seminal Antonioni classics, *L'avventura* (1960), *La notte* (1961), and *L'eclisse* (1962). He believes that there is no reason to think that these Italian-French co-productions were less compromised by global finance than *Zabriskie Point*. Still, if the French contribution to the earlier films should in theory compromise their identity as forms of independent Italian art cinema, that contribution has been mostly overlooked because French money doesn't disrupt the comfortable and *marketable* assumptions about art cinema the way American money does. My feeling is that critics who treat a movie like *Blow-Up* only as popular cinema, excluded from issues of a "legitimate" art cinema, are relying on the flimsiest of stereotypes, the most mythical of oppositions. The illogic of such exclusions is similar to that which has been invoked to exclude indie-style art films from legitimate art cinema.

But if these exclusions do accentuate the hybrid status of these forms, they cannot detract from the fact that most of these films were made to be traditional art films, i.e., to circulate among other art films in the legitimate culture of film festivals and art houses where they might be discussed by cinephiles, art lovers, and academics. Again, as with *The Brown Bunny*, it doesn't always matter whether viewers or critics *like* these films. Their institutional identities often exist apart from evaluation.

### Art Cinema's "Free Pass"

"How many film directors make films to satisfy their sexual fantasies?"

"I would imagine most of them."

—8½ *Women* (Peter Greenaway, 1999)

So far, we've looked at several examples of how the art-film format has in effect acted as a recovery-and-legitimation machine. It has legitimated movies that few people like—and, depending on circumstances, it has recovered movies from commercialized areas that cinephiles distrust. Thus, it can recover movies from the dustbin of low-budget, non-theatrical distribution—and it can even legitimate whole classes of Hollywood film, such as the indie-style art film. But one of the art film's most spectacular capacities has been its ability to recover and legitimate certain types of imagery that are seemingly unfit for "refined" audiences due to their copious violence or sex. Still, this capacity should not lead us to imagine that the art film is a "benevolent" or "tolerant" format. This special permission is a matter of institutional machinery, not of altruism. We should think instead of the art film as an adaptable market format that has grown more tolerant of genre-coded motifs, especially violent ones, since Quentin Tarantino proved through the vast success of his Miramax film *Pulp Fiction* (1994) the popular, commercial appeal of festival films that qualify as cult art movies *and* as traditional art films.

Indeed, ever since *Pulp Fiction* won Cannes' Palme d'Or in 1994, and particularly over the past decade, art films featuring attributes identified with cult genre movies have been appearing with regularity on the festival circuit. Thus, there have been many urban art-crime films in the tradition of *Pulp Fiction*, from the Hong Kong film *Fallen Angels* (1995) to the Brazilian-Chinese co-production of *Plastic City* (2008). But there has also been the entire art-house phenomenon that Joan Hawkins has referred to as "art horror." Over the past decade, art horror has had many practitioners, from Denis to Lars von Trier, but its reigning auteur now seems to be the South Korean director Park Chan-wook, who has won prestigious awards at Cannes for *Oldboy* (2003) and *Thirst* (2009). Both films are gore-filled romps that combine elements of many cult traditions, including martial-arts movies, crime thrillers, vampire flicks, and sci-fi movies.<sup>218</sup> Some cult art movies no longer need to be "recovered," then, in the sense that Dario Argento's *Suspiria* (1977) and even John Dahl's *The Last Seduction* (1994) were recovered for art-house audiences. Instead, cult art movies such as Wong Kar-wai's *Fallen Angels*, Park's *Thirst*, and von Trier's *Antichrist* (2009) have been legitimate from the start, for as high-profile art films, they were made to succeed in the most legitimate institutions.

What the institutions of the art film are reclaiming, then, is not specific movies or specific forms of production and distribution; they are instead reclaiming materials that art cinema has historically abandoned to lower-status formats. Of course, in using these materials, they must often reclaim debased market areas, such as those associated with the NC-17 rating. Art films have embraced this controversial rating more often than any other type of movie, going back to Philip Kaufman's *Henry and June* (1990) and Pedro Almodóvar's *Tie Me Up! Tie Me Down!* (1990). But I believe that this enthusiasm is just

a corollary of the art film's traditional emphasis on controversial content.<sup>219</sup> After all, the art film has, since the format's inception in films like Gustav Machatý's *Ecstasy* (1933), had a tradition of reclaiming lowbrow content from cult genres that include exploitation and porn. Thus, in the 1970s, Liliana Cavani's *The Night Porter* (1974) and Pier Paolo Pasolini's *Salò* (1975) used elements of Nazi exploitation (or "Nazisploitation") movies, a low-budget tradition in Italy at the time. But as the example of *Ecstasy* demonstrates so amply, the longest and most robust art-film tradition has always been the recovery and legitimation for upscale audiences of sexual motifs debased by pornographic overtones. Some new trends have emerged in this tradition over the last two decades—but we must be clear that these trends are only new *within* this tradition.

Let me explain. The art film's association with porn goes back in the U.S. and the U.K. to the 1930s and to directors like Machatý, but this linkage was most prevalent in the postwar era, when the foreign films of Bergman, Federico Fellini, Roger Vadim, and so on came to stand for it. Thus, by 1980, Steve Neale had recognized that, "from the mid-1960s onward," art cinema had "stabilised itself around a new genre: the soft-core art film," which he defined in terms of legitimate art films like *Belle de jour* (1967), *The Night Porter*, *Private Vices, Public Virtues* (1976), and so on.<sup>220</sup> Neale's use of "soft-core" implies that the art films of the time were understood to be pornographic or semi-pornographic. These films depended on a *simulated* brand of sexuality. This imagery maximized its depictions of the female face, as justified by art cinema's new stress on psychology and interiority, as well as its depictions of the unclothed female body. The controversy that greeted this imagery, even in its timid, neorealist forms, often raised the profile of its creators and added marketability to the art films in which it appeared. After

Hollywood's 1968 switch to a rating system, these softcore art films were even made by American directors linked to the uninhibited New Hollywood.

None of this was happening in a vacuum, of course. In the U.S., exploitation and avant-garde producers had long dabbled in unsimulated, or hardcore, sexual imagery. In tandem with a growing cultural permissiveness, producers of "mainstream" sexploitation and producers of underground stag films moved at about the same general moment to introduce the hardcore feature, the first example of which was *Mona* (1970). Thus, by 1972, when Gerard Damiano debuted *Deep Throat* in New York, the porno-chic era had arrived in the U.S. Besides its consolidation of hardcore sexual motifs like "meat shots" and "money shots,"<sup>221</sup> the hardcore-movie industry was notable for rendering unsimulated sexual imagery and the X rating, which the MPAA did not legally own, all but unusable by legitimate productions. Indeed, not even the introduction of the copyrighted NC-17 rating in 1990, which was meant to replace the disreputable X rating, eased these stigmas, leaving the NC-17 designation largely unused to this day.

Of course, the hardcore industry has not been uniformly disreputable. Beside its mainstream triumphs in the porno-chic period, the hardcore industry quickly engendered a loose hierarchy partly based on the high-art values of other cinemas. Hardcore auteurs like the Mitchell Brothers, Gerard Damiano, Henry Paris (Metzger), and Chuck Vincent consolidated their credentials by aspiring to art cinema, as certified by celebrated classics that include *Behind the Green Door* (1972), *The Devil in Miss Jones* (1973), *Resurrection of Eve* (1973), *The Opening of Misty Beethoven* (1975), and *Roommates* (1981). In 1984, *Adult Video News* launched the AVN Awards, an Academy Awards-like night bestowing honors in many categories, gradually elevating auteurs such as Candida

Royalle, Stephen Sayadian, Andrew Blake, Michael Ninn, John Leslie, Gregory Dark, etc. The notoriety of this illegitimate value generator has served to disseminate hardcore's mix of traditional and untraditional values through the culture. European hardcore cinemas have produced comparable hierarchies, especially in prestigious continental markets like France, Italy, and Germany, where directors like Marc Dorcel and Tinto Brass have been hailed as auteurs. Still, the porn industry's attempts at self-legitimation have not been successful because one of its global values has been the social transgression it aligns with taboos or "dirtiness." Along with the industry's mob history and humanity's clear evolutionary bias against pornography,<sup>222</sup> this self-conscious elevation of transgression has in effect blocked hardcore's entry into legitimate culture.

Thus, since the end of porno chic, auteurs have had to keep clear lines between their art films and "real" hardcore. Auteurs that make highly sexualized art films cannot be seen as trafficking in the same sexploitation as hardcore pornographers, for doing so carries a greater risk of branding their art films as worthless—thus barring them from the mainstream markets to which they ultimately aspire—than it did before and during porno chic, when even softcore sexploiteers aspired to mainstream-ness through the crossover potential of their quasi-legitimate softcore art films (cf. Sarno's *Inga*, Metzger's *Therese and Isabelle*, and Just Jaeckin's *Emmanuelle* [1974]). Nevertheless, these auteurs *do* want to approach hardcore. They want to play with it, redeeming its explicitness; they want to prove that its signature imagery has legitimate purposes. And they want to harness its commercial appeal in a way that, over their careers, enlarges their distribution potential. Auteurs can do all this by relying on the freedom and the legitimacy of the traditional art film and its value generators, the film festival in particular.

But these auteurs have not necessarily wanted to cash in right away. As Bourdieu has shown, high-art producers usually approach their careers as vocations. As a result, they take the long view, understanding the long-term distribution benefits of a brand of cultural distinction that may not translate into economic capital all at once. Auteurs are no exception here, which is why they have used sex to accentuate their notoriety even if, as Jon Lewis has noted, their employment of the most risqué motifs has not led to the biggest box-office in recent years.<sup>223</sup> And the fact that the reputations of these auteurs often outstrip their profits works well for them, since auteurs like Catherine Breillat have not wanted to be confused with pornographers. Some of the evidence of this is formal: their art films have over the past decades contrived extremely specialized mannerisms that flirt with pornography but that may always be differentiated from hard- *and* softcore motifs. Thus, in recovering and legitimating explicit material, these auteurs may *seem* brave—but they have often performed these functions in a way that protects and enlarges their distribution potential over the course of their careers.

When it comes to unsimulated sexual activity, art-film auteurs have been pushing the envelope for over fifteen years. For example, Philip Hass's *Angels and Insects* (1995) contains simulated sex and is only distinguished by glimpses of an erection. Von Trier's *Idioterne* (1998), hardly a "sexy" film, contains an orgy with hardcore inserts. Jang Sun-woo's *Lies* (1999) overflows with nudity, simulated sex, and sado-masochistic activity. But it was French auteurs of "The New French Extremism" who burst the dam.<sup>224</sup> Leos Carax included unsimulated sexual activity in *Pola X* (1999), Breillat included the same in *Romance* (1999), Virginie Despentes and Coralie Trinh Thi included it in *Baise-moi* (2000), and Patrice Chéreau included it in *Intimacy* (2001). From there, the trend became

truly global, encompassing Julio Medem's *Lucía y el sexo* (2001), Larry Clark's *Ken Park* (2002), Gallo's *The Brown Bunny*, Dumont's *Twentynine Palms* (2003), Michael Winterbottom's *9 Songs* (2004), Carlos Reygadas's *Batalla en el cielo* (2005), Tsai Ming-liang's *The Wayward Cloud* (2005), John Cameron Mitchell's *Shortbus* (2006), and von Trier's *Antichrist*, among many other examples.

These films, many of which have usually been released unrated in America, may include unsimulated fellatio, cunnilingus, heterosexual intercourse, same-sex intercourse, anal penetration, and ejaculation. The sexual imagery of these art films is distinguished from “actual” hardcore through its realistic style, which avoids close-ups or “meat shots”<sup>225</sup>; through its integration with the drama, which places spectacle in the context of narrative; and through its mostly (apart from the example of *Shortbus*) downbeat thrust, which strips these art films of the pro-sex messaging common in porn. These films are also distinguished from hardcore by the production values they share with other art films: they are medium-cost narratives often shot on 35mm film and released to theaters, while most hardcore movies are today ultra-low-budget, shot-on-video, all-sex affairs that are distributed non-theatrically. But the fact that these art films include *any* unsimulated activity at all differentiates them from softcore movies.

Nevertheless, we should not look at these market-oriented differences naïvely. That would support the false dichotomies that have reinforced the illusory borders that separate art from porn, distinctions that have obscured the fact that porn is usually a form of art.<sup>226</sup> Indeed, subliminally, these films actually seem to narrow the distance between themselves and hardcore. For example, *9 Songs* had to defend itself on its first release as much because of its openly pornographic format—which all but dispenses with narrative,

oscillating between sexual numbers and musical numbers—as because of its fellatio, its intercourse, and its ejaculation.<sup>227</sup> And some of these films incorporate aspects of “actual” hardcore by using crossover actors or by having characters witness “actual” hardcore imagery within the frame of the narrative. Hence, Breillat was celebrated for using Italian hardcore star Rocco Siffredi in *Romance* and *Anatomie de l’enfer* (2004)<sup>228</sup>—a practice that has since then become a standard element of films like *Baise-moi*, *Lucía y el sexo*, and Steven Soderbergh’s *The Girlfriend Experience* (2009), which gains much of its “exotic” authenticity from exploiting the unapologetic background of its female lead in the adult film industry.<sup>229, 230</sup> What is more, in their narratives, films like *Lucía y el sexo* and *Baise-moi* often expose their characters to carefully framed imagery taken from hardcore. These tactics are part of a trend to frame seemingly hardcore images within art films. This trend, which is linked to the “porn-in-film” effects that Catherine Zuromskis has discussed *vis-à-vis* mainstream films,<sup>231</sup> is at work in many recent art films. They include Hal Hartley’s *Amateur* (1994), David Lynch’s *Lost Highway* (1996), Gaspar Noé’s *Seul contre tous* (1998) and *Irréversible* (2002), Gough Lewis’s *Sex: The Annabel Chong Story* (1999), Despentès and Trinh Thi’s *Baise-moi*, Michael Haneke’s *La pianiste* (2001), Medem’s *Lucía y el sexo*, Ash Baron-Cohen’s *This Girl’s Life* (2003), Clément Virgo’s *Lie With Me* (2005), Tsai’s *The Wayward Cloud*, Jacques Audiard’s *Un Prophète* (2009), Giorgos Lanthimos’s *Dogtooth* (2009), and so on.

What we should probably resist, however, is the standard rhetoric used to promote these films. The presence of hardcore images in films like *Romance* does *not* make them the most controversial cinema ever, and these films are *not* going anywhere that the cinema hasn’t been before. Indeed, these sexed-up art films are neither the most explicit

nor the most controversial movies ever. After all, cinema has been used to record actual human sex since early in its history; and if we are talking about mainstream movies, *Deep Throat*, a “real” hardcore film, went mainstream in the U.S. four decades ago. Indeed, as Linda Williams has shown, even legitimate art films have a tradition of using graphic and pervasive unsimulated sexuality, as Nagisa Oshima’s *Ai no corrida* (1976) confirms<sup>232</sup>—and if we focus on art cinema as a super-generic whole, we will see that Metzger, Blake, and Ninn have been purveying hardcore sex in art movies for quite some time. If there’s anything new here, it is the persistence with which these particular art films have used this imagery to create a seemingly permanent new commercial market for unsimulated sex within highbrow cinemas. All in all, by looking across this trend, we can see that the art film and its institutions have exercised its free pass to recover these debased motifs—but only for use within this one very specific market niche.

Before closing, we should remember that this freedom is a variant of the art film’s traditional permission to circulate provocative and disturbing materials in mainstream markets where such materials might be subject to exclusion were it not for this format’s cultural capital. So this freedom isn’t simply a matter of the art film’s ability to show explicit sex. It also applies to the format’s habitual use of realistic, often downbeat materials, as in its focus on mental cruelty and abuse; on misogyny and rape; on violence and torture; on carnage and gore; on racism and/or “the exotic”; on homophobia; on profanity; on pedophilia, incest, and bestiality; on drug use; and on existential despair. These motifs, which are common in the American, European, and Asian art films of today, might initially seem unfit for the mainstream outlets where art films are sold. But in context, they function as signs of the seriousness that is high art’s rationale. Thus,

according to Dominique Russell, cinephiles have been able to “douse” the cultural disputes over rape scenes in recent art films by Pedro Almodóvar, Mike Leigh, and Lars von Trier through “evocations of art and a higher purpose”—which is to say, in much the same way that cinephiles doused similar disputes apropos art films by the likes of Ingmar Bergman, Akira Kurosawa, and Robert Bresson.<sup>233</sup> The defenders of these films, and in a sense the auteurs themselves, exercised art cinema’s free pass.

Several recent pieces have investigated these dynamics. In “‘Typically French’?: Mediating Screened Rape to British Audiences” (2010), Martin Barker does sociological research on “Frenchness,” trying to figure out whether a national stereotype functions for British viewers as a “cover for potentially dangerous and arousing experiences,” such that it is an “art-house excuse, so that middle-class elites can get to see and relish things that aren’t ‘safe’ for ordinary folks.”<sup>234</sup> Barker exposes considerable variation in regard to British perceptions of Frenchness, but it is evident that cultural stereotypes of French “seriousness” do exist, stereotypes that give distributors and cultural guardians the alibis they need to permit the circulation of “typically” French movies. Moreover, mainstream movie critics like A.O. Scott and David Ansen have chronicled the derivative quality that art films depicting rape, torture, mental cruelty, and similar motifs often manifest. These materials reflect the commitment of today’s auteurs to a “dogma of artistic obduracy”—and in an art-film economy that has for over five years been steadily losing the support of Hollywood, such motifs have increasingly revealed themselves as conventional and even ordinary.<sup>235</sup> These trends have led to a situation in which Scott and Ansen have separately complained of a film-festival culture that is “gratifyingly cosmopolitan” yet “narrow, small and self-regarding” in its “academic” use of images of sex and violence and themes

of existential darkness.<sup>236</sup> But I believe that it is specifically because these materials are so “generic” (to use a highly problematic term) that they have a reliable place in art cinema. For audiences, the presence of these materials makes for predictable experiences, like any generic content—except, of course, that this dark material is not necessary-or-sufficient to an art film, as song-and-dance numbers are to a musical.

What does all this tell us? That the art film has tremendous cultural status. Thus, its producers and distributors have been able to bestow some of that status on previously illegitimate films, filmmakers, distribution channels, and cinematic materials, just as art-world insiders have always been able to bestow art’s high-culture status on themselves and their audiences as well as on their art works, art materials, and art channels.<sup>237</sup> The art film’s institutions have been strong and supple enough to legitimate even the most dubious films as high art—and its value generators have been able to sanctify the most déclassé forms of production and distribution. What is more, because of the cultural strength of its institutions and the way in which its prestige has flowed across the globe, the art film has gradually been able to recover and legitimate downbeat themes and even the most debased motifs associated with cult genres. Thus, at its extreme, this trend has extended its “free pass” to the unsimulated sexuality linked with hardcore, establishing a respectable market for “actual” sex in the art films of the past two decades. Ergo, the art film remains the format truest to art cinema’s most legendary function, the consecration of new movie forms as high art—and it seems unlikely that a less traditional format will replace it as art cinema’s legitimation machine anytime soon.

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192

## NOTES TO CHAPTER SIX

<sup>236</sup>Newman seems conflicted in making this point, as if he wants to call indie films art films but is not ready to depart with convention to this degree. Michael Z. Newman, *Indie: An American Film Culture*

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(New York: Columbia University Press, 2011), p. 76.

<sup>193</sup> Andrew Tudor, "The Rise and Fall of the Art (House) Movie," *The Sociology of Art: Ways of Seeing*, ed. David Inglis and John Hughson (London: Basingstoke, 2005), p. 127.

<sup>194</sup> Haidee Wasson, *Museum Movies: The Museum of Modern Art and the Birth of Art Cinema* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2005), pp. 1-31, and Barbara Wilinsky, *Sure Seaters: The Emergence of Art House Cinema* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2001), pp. 41-79. See also Tino Balio, *The Foreign Film Renaissance on American Screens, 1946-1973* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 2010), pp. 25-26.

<sup>195</sup> Shyon Baumann, *Hollywood Highbrow: From Entertainment to Art* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2007), p. 1.

<sup>196</sup>

Ibid., pp. 22, 31, 82, 115.

<sup>197</sup> Steve Neale, "Art Cinema as Institution," *Screen*, vol. 22, no. 1 (Spring 1981), pp. 16-29.

<sup>198</sup> Baumann, *Hollywood Highbrow*, pp. 113, 148-155.

<sup>199</sup> As exploitation distributor David Friedman once put it, American viewers weren't only excited about Bergman because of "his creativity or because he was a great film director"; they were also excited "because he showed some ass and some tits." Jim Morton, "Interview with Dave Friedman," *Incredibly Strange Films*, ed. V. Vale and Andrea Juno (1986; San Francisco: Re/Search, 1988), p. 102.

<sup>200</sup> Mark Betz has written extensively on this topic. See Mark Betz, "The Name Above the (Sub)Title: Internationalism, Coproduction, and Polyglot European Art Cinema," *Camera Obscura*, vol. 16 (2001), pp. 2-5. This article is reprinted in Mark Betz, *Beyond the Subtitle: Remapping European Art Cinema* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2009), pp. 45-92.

<sup>201</sup> Neale, "Art Cinema as Institution," pp. 30-33. See also Jack Stevenson, "And God Created Europe: How the European Sexual Myth Was Created and Sold to Post-War American Movie Audiences," *Fleshpot: Cinema's Sexual Myth Makers and Taboo Breakers*, ed. Jack Stevenson (Manchester: Critical Vision, 2002), pp. 17-48. The idea that the distribution of art cinema was expanded in the U.S. due to the sexuality of the foreign art films is especially well dealt with by Balio throughout *Foreign Film Renaissance*.

<sup>202</sup> See Shyon Baumann, "Intellectualization and Art World Development: Film in the United States," *American Sociological Review*, vol. 66 (June 2001), pp. 408-409; see also Baumann, *Hollywood Highbrow*, pp. 54-59. For more on the festival circuit, see Chapter Twelve.

<sup>203</sup> See Sven Dubie, "Obscene History in the Heights: The Case of Nico Jacobellis and *Les Amants*," Cleveland Historical Society website. Available at <<http://chhistory.org/FeatureStories.php?Story=ObsceneHistory>>. Accessed October 11, 2009. On *Les amants*, see Balio, *Foreign Film Renaissance*, pp. 145-148.

<sup>204</sup> Quoted on the IMDb site. Available at <<http://www.imdb.com/title/tt0330099/awards>>. Accessed April 4, 2009.

<sup>205</sup> Quoted on the IMDb site. Available at <<http://www.imdb.com/title/tt0330099/>>. Accessed April 4, 2009.

<sup>206</sup> Bart Testa, "Soft-Shaft Opportunism: Radley Metzger's Erotic Kitsch," *Spectator*, vol. 19, no. 2 (Spring/Summer 1999), pp. 41, 52, 43.

<sup>207</sup> For example, Patricia Zimmermann notes that "independent exhibitors call American indie films 'art films without subtitles'." Patricia Zimmermann, "Digital Deployment(s)," *Contemporary American Independent Film: From the Margins to the Mainstream*, ed. Chris Holmlund and Justin Wyatt (New York: Routledge, 2005), p. 248. Michael Z. Newman takes a more nuanced position in *Indie: An American Film Culture*, where he admits that indie films have a similar set of sociological functions as art films but are not art films, presumably because they are not foreign art films. Newman, *Indie*, p. 76.

- <sup>208</sup> Michael Z. Newman makes this abundantly clear in "Indie Culture: In Pursuit of the Authentic Autonomous Alternative," *Cinema Journal*, vol. 48, no. 3 (Spring 2009), pp. 16-34.
- <sup>209</sup> The finest discussion of these issues may be found in Newman, *Indie*; see pp. 2-12 in particular.
- <sup>210</sup> Charlie Bennett, "How Indie Is Indie?," letter to the editors, *Sight & Sound*, vol. 19, no. 3 (March 2009), p. 96.
- <sup>211</sup> This sentiment has been evident in many post-2008 articles on the state of independent film published in mainstream forums like *The New York Times* or *Sight & Sound*. For example, Michael Cieply, "As Studios Cut Budgets, Independent Filmmakers Distribute on Their Own," *The New York Times* (12 Aug. 2009), online issue. Available at <<http://www.nytimes.com/2009/08/13/business/media/13independent.html?hp>>. Accessed August 13, 2009.
- <sup>212</sup> For more on this, see Jen Webb, *et al.*, *Understanding Bourdieu* (London: Sage, 2002), p. 167.
- <sup>213</sup> See Azadeh Farahmand, "Disentangling the International Festival Circuit: Genre and Iranian Cinema," *Global Art Cinema: New Theories and Histories*, ed. Rosalind Galt and Karl Schoonover (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010), pp. 263-281; and Randal Halle, "Offering Tales They Want to Hear: Transnational European Film Funding as Neo-Orientalism," *Global Art Cinema: New Theories and Histories*, ed. Rosalind Galt and Karl Schoonover (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010), pp. 303-319.
- <sup>214</sup> Peter Lev focuses at length on this subject. E.g., Peter Lev, *The Euro-American Cinema* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1993), pp. xi-xiv. See also Balio, *Foreign Film Renaissance*, and Thomas Guback, *The International Film Industry* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1969).
- <sup>215</sup> Lev, *Euro-American Cinema*, p. 25. Lev draws on Guback at arriving at this statistic.
- <sup>216</sup> Betz, "Name Above the (Sub)Title," p. 15. Betz's italics.
- <sup>217</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 9.
- <sup>218</sup> See Joan Hawkins, "Culture Wars: Some New Trends in Art Horror," *Jump Cut*, no. 51 (Spring 2009), pp. 1-2. Available at <[http://www.ejumpcut.org/current issue/artHorror/text.html](http://www.ejumpcut.org/current%20issue/artHorror/text.html)>. Accessed June 21, 2009.
- <sup>219</sup> Neale, "Art Cinema as Institution," pp. 30-33.
- <sup>220</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 33.
- <sup>221</sup> For the best available discussion of hardcore cinema, see Linda Williams, *Hard Core: Power, Pleasure, and the "Frenzy of the Visible"* (1989; Berkeley: University of California Press, 1999).
- <sup>222</sup> Here I refer to the speculations that I first made in another another article. See David Andrews, "Toward a More Valid Definition of 'Pornography,'" *The Journal of Popular Culture*, forthcoming. One of my arguments there is that evolutionary psychology, the branch of evolutionary biology dedicated to the notion of "human nature," may soon have something to teach us about porn. Though noted evolutionists have disputed that evolutionary science can say anything rigorous about the arts, they have admitted that evolutionary psychology's claims about the adaptive roots of human behavior are strongest in areas like sex. Thus, Jerry Coyne agrees with the evolutionary psychologists that "human males are largely promiscuous and females choosy (this despite the socially enforced monogamy that prevails in many societies)." Jerry Coyne, *Why Evolution Is True*. New York: Viking, 2009, p. 228. To me, it seems inevitable that evolutionary theorists will one day draw on this consensus to (1) interpret the pleasure of pornography as a male pursuit rooted in an evolved sex drive that leads heterosexual men to mate with as many women as possible and to (2) interpret our traditional bias against porn as a cultural by-product of this genetic difference between the sexes, one that is as reliable as society's bias against promiscuity. If this analysis is correct, anti-porn biases may be as slow to change as human nature.
- <sup>223</sup> Jon Lewis, "Real Sex: Aesthetics and Economics of Art-House Porn." *Jump Cut*, no. 51

(Spring 2009), pp. 3-4. Available at  
<<http://www.ejumpcut.org/currentissue/LewisRealsex/text.html>>. Accessed June 21, 2009.

224

<sup>224</sup> This term was coined by James Quandt. See James Quandt, "Flesh and Blood: Sex and Violence in Recent French Cinema.," *Art Forum* (February 2004), pp. 126-132. For examples of how critics have used this term, see Hawkins, "Culture Wars," pp. 7, 11n23.

<sup>225</sup> Linda Williams, "Cinema and the Sex Act," *Cineaste*, vol. 27, no. 1 (Winter 2001), p. 23, and Lisa Downing, "French Cinema's New 'Sexual Revolution': Postmodern Porn and Troubled Genre," *French Cultural Studies*, vol. 15, no. 3 (2004), p. 276.

<sup>226</sup> For example of this sort of distinction, see Downing, who concludes that the films of the New French Extremism "are not porn. Nor are they even art films *about* porn. Rather, they are attempts to disrupt, fragment or destroy the naturalized relationship between the voyeur and the desired spectacle in cinema." Downing, "New 'Sexual Revolution,'" p. 279.

<sup>227</sup> Brian McNair, "'Not Some Kind of Kinky Porno Flick': The Return of Porno-Fear?," *Bridge*, no. 11 (Aug./Sept. 2004), p. 16.

<sup>228</sup> Williams, "Cinema and the Sex Act," pp. 22-23.

<sup>229</sup> As Chris Lee documents, Soderbergh even admits "to a certain degree of exploitation" of Sasha Grey. "Soderbergh gave Grey the lead role in the film . . . fully intending to milk her X-rated fame for all it is worth. 'I was very much counting on the fact that the interest in her would be greater than the interest in the movie,' Soderbergh said. 'We would be drafting off her notoriety rather than vice versa. I needed her. That's no different than getting Brad Pitt to be in your movie, albeit in a different context.'" Chris Lee, "Porn Star Sasha Grey Gets Mainstream Role," *Los Angeles Times* (May 21, 2009), online edition. Available at <<http://www.latimes.com/entertainment/news/la-et-sasha-grey21-2009may21,0,7751766.story>>. Accessed May 31, 2009.

<sup>230</sup> This crossover trend can be seen to some extent among the auteurs, too. E.g., *Baise-moi*, a movie whose contributions to this hardcore trend in the traditional art film is vigorous and beyond dispute, was co-directed by Coralie Trinh Thi, who has starred in many hardcore movies—including hardcore art movies like Blake's *Paris Chic* (1997). Not incidentally, *Baise-moi* also stars women who have acted extensively in European hardcore productions.

<sup>231</sup> Catherine Zuromskis, "Prurient Pictures and Popular Film: The Crisis of Pornographic Representation," *The Velvet Light Trap*, no. 59 (Spring 2007), pp. 9-13.

<sup>232</sup> Given the existence of this tradition, it is interesting that Breillat has referred to *Romance*—a film whose advertising campaigns have depended on the idea that the film goes places other art films haven't—was inspired by Oshima's notorious art movie. See Saul Anton, "Catherine Breillat Opens Up About *Romance*, Sex, and Censorship," *indieWire* (September 23, 1999), online interview. Available at

<[http://www.indiewire.com/article/interview\\_catherine\\_breillat\\_opens\\_up\\_about\\_romance\\_sex\\_and\\_censorship/](http://www.indiewire.com/article/interview_catherine_breillat_opens_up_about_romance_sex_and_censorship/)>. Accessed May 23, 2009. See also Williams, "Cinema and the Sex Act," p. 20.

233

<sup>233</sup> Dominique Russell, "Introduction: Why Rape?," *Rape in Art Cinema* (New York: Continuum, 2010), p. 6.

234

<sup>234</sup> Martin Barker, "'Typically French'?: Mediating Screened Rape to British Audiences," *Rape in Art Cinema*, ed. Dominique Russell (New York: Continuum, 2010), p. 146.

235

<sup>235</sup> See A.O. Scott, "Wallowing in Misery for Art's Sake," *New York Times*, October 7, 2009, pp. 2, 3. Available at <<http://www.nytimes.com/2009/10/07/movies/07festival.html>>. Accessed November 2, 2009. See also David Ansen, "Shock and Yawn," *Newsweek* (October 26, 2009), p. 48.

236

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<sup>237</sup>See Scott, "Wallowing in Misery," p. 3 and Ansen, "Shock and Yawn," pp 48-50. As Scott points out, the recession still underway among Hollywood's indie-style divisions has only exacerbated these trends, since those labels circulated the more optimistic, art-house fare that sold more tickets.

Baumann, *Hollywood Highbrow*, p. 6; see also p. 176.

## NOTES TO CHAPTER SEVEN

### Chapter Six / Losing the Asterisk: *A Theory of Cult Art Cinema*

In a 1986 interview with Andrea Juno, the cult-horror director Frank Henenlotter made it clear that, unlike Sam Raimi's cult classic *The Evil Dead* (1981), his cult classic, *Basket Case* (1982), was an unimportant film and that he was an unimportant director, one who at most deserved a "footnote with an asterisk" by comparison.<sup>238</sup> What makes this judgment something other than a straightforward expression of humility is the fact that it comes at the end of a conversation that takes it for granted that there is value in cheap, unimportant things and in any project governed by "bad taste." As a result, the interview displays the earmarks of the 1980s cult sensibility that was just taking shape. Even today, cult cinema remains a super-genre whose participants fetishize the cultural illegitimacy of their own cult activities and forms, often wearing their "shame" as a badge of honor in cult contexts. In a sense, this illegitimacy lends these participants a

narrow mystique with a restricted legitimacy. Because this legitimacy is only intermittently recognized outside the cult nexus, I refer to it as “subcultural legitimacy.”

These are elementary assertions, to be sure, but their implications stretch beyond cult cinema. If we can apply them with understanding, we may be able to understand cult cinema’s complex overlaps with other fields. As always, my ultimate goal here is to grasp art cinema in all its diversity and nuance. Consequently, in this chapter, I approach this category through a peculiar combination of attitudes, activities, and forms that I call “cult art cinema.” Cult art cinema happens in the subcultural spaces where cult cinema and art cinema share different forms of overlap. What is curious about cult art cinema is that it exemplifies the cult phenomenon even as its manifest aspiration to high-art distinction threatens to erase its cult identity—an identity Henenlotter is careful to embrace through his idea of an asterisk qualifying his own status. In this multivalence, cult art cinema shows us how imperfect the old ideas of art cinema are. Its qualified aspirationalism sends us back, in effect, to the theoretical drawing-board.

But before we can approach cult art cinema, we must understand cult cinema as a larger whole. We must, then, struggle with questions of definition and history as well as with issues relating to cult production and to cult consumption. Only then will we be equipped to tackle the issues most directly related to art cinema, including cult auteurism, cult canonization, and the formal diversity of the cult art movie.

### Definitions of “Cult Cinema”

What is cult cinema, anyway? More specifically, is it most useful to think of this phenomenon as a group of subcultural artifacts or as a group of subcultural processes? There are, after all, traditions for presenting cult cinema in both ways. For example, in

their introduction to *The Cult Film Reader* (2008), Ernest Mathijs and Xavier Mendik seem to define cult cinema primarily as a set of movies:

Cult films transgress common notions of good and bad taste, and they challenge genre conventions and coherent storytelling, often using intertextual references, gore, leaving loose ends or creating a sense of nostalgia. They have troublesome production histories . . . and in spite of often-limited accessibility, they have a continuous market value and a long-lasting public presence.<sup>239</sup>

There are, however, problems with presenting cult cinema as a group of movies. Even if cult fans are mainly interested in the movies, as is often the case, there is really nothing permanent or absolute about which movies are designated “cult movies.” As a result, cult theorists often make moves similar to those made by aestheticians in the philosophy of art before the interventions of Morris Weitz and George Dickie: they think that the historical reality of *some* cult movies may be promoted as the ahistorical essence of *all* cult movies. But this can’t work. Have *all* cult movies had “troublesome production histories”? Have *all* of them “challenge[d] genre conventions and coherent storytelling”? And even if they actually had, how would this fact restrict future examples?

A more serviceable approach is charted in *Defining Cult Movies* (2003). In introducing this collection, Mark Jancovich and his colleagues pursue a strategy of defining cult cinema in terms of “subcultural ideology”:

[T]he “cult movie” is an essentially eclectic category. It is not defined according to some single, unifying feature shared by all cult movies but rather through a “subcultural” ideology in filmmakers, films or audiences [that] are seen as existing in opposition to the “mainstream” . . . “cult” is largely a matter of the ways in which films are classified in consumption, although it is certainly the case that filmmakers often shared the same “subcultural ideology” as fans and have set out to make self-consciously “cult” materials . . . the mainstream remains central, despite its incoherence, because it is necessary so that cult fans can produce a sense of distinction . . . To put it another way, it is necessary because it is by presenting themselves as oppositional that cult audiences are able to confer value upon both themselves and the films around which they congregate.<sup>240</sup>

This definition is useful because it acknowledges the textual multiplicity and contingency of cult cinema but still manages to move beyond it, pursuing the sociological realities that unify the cult phenomenon. Through their ideas of cult adversarialism, Jancovich and his fellow editors see how cult participants re-value abject positions, achieving subcultural legitimacy through their opposition to the “mainstream.” But we should be careful here, for this idea of cult adversarialism is easily overdone. As scholars have noted, the cult nexus is not deeply militant in its opposition to more dominant sectors like mainstream cinema or art cinema.<sup>241</sup> This oppositionalism is often nominal, limited to subcultures or pursued as a marketing strategy only. What is more, cult cinema is not the only super-genre to have constructed itself as an adversary to a context-specific “mainstream.” Art cinema has presented itself as adversarial, too, often by opposing the Hollywood cinemas and cult cinemas that depart from its pure-art value systems.

What I stress in this chapter is that a good way to conceive of cult cinema is as a set of *dominated* cultural positions whose oppositionalism and legitimacy are largely restricted to cult subcultures.<sup>242</sup> By thinking of cult cinema in this fashion, we can avoid any confusion relating to cult oppositionalism. We can also avoid confusion with the avant-garde, which is a highly adversarial sector of art cinema whose legitimacy is, like cult cinema, mainly recognized subculturally but whose values, unlike cult cinema, the dominant art cinemas claim to share. (See the next chapter.)

### A Brief History of Cult Cinema

If our aim is to grasp cult cinema as a set of dominated and illegitimate cultural positions and not as a set of “underground” movies, we need to forget for a moment all the things that currently typify cult cinema. Once we do this, we will understand why it

was that through the 1960s art-house tastes were often called “cult” tastes in America by critics like Andrew Sarris, Susan Sontag, and Amos Vogel.<sup>243</sup> These tastemakers weren’t just wrong. Rather, in their day, the postwar European art cinemas did not yet represent a fully traditional or “legitimate” adjunct of the American cinematic establishment, which is why the art film’s sexuality could be sold for decades beside that of exploitation films on an American circuit primarily devoted to the latter.<sup>244</sup> But with time, the status of the postwar cinemas was recognized by more American critics and marketed as high art by a more specialized circuit of festivals, art houses, and film societies. After the 1960s, the traditional art film could no longer be upheld as an oppositional cult taste in American circles; it had become far too highbrow and official.

The cult sensibility, as currently constructed, does have some things in common with the high-art sensibility. E.g., both cult cinema and art cinema portray themselves as indie outsiders in an industry dominated by Hollywood—and both cinemas seem equally disingenuous in making these claims.<sup>245</sup> But it is the differences between these cinemas that usually dictate our thinking about them. For example, the cult sensibility departs from art cinema’s high-art values by endorsing an active audience and by embracing its own genre-based commercialism. Cult cinema would be hard-pressed to reject these aspects of itself, given how often it has been identified with the “trash” aesthetic that emerged from a taste for the youth-oriented exploitation flicks and “midnight movies” first produced in abundance in the 1950s and 1960s. The *déclassé* popularity of these films coalesced into a distinctive sensibility in the 1980s, when the cult nexus established a nostalgic identification with the declining exploitation circuit. At that moment, “cult cinema became self-aware of its status as cult,” according to Mathijs and Mendik, and

“the ritualistic reception of cult cinema became institutionalized.”<sup>246</sup> This growth of cult institutions—triggered by a grass-roots sense that traditional critics were too willfully ignorant to say anything useful about low-end genres like horror films, sex movies, action movies, thrillers, teen comedies, and so on—meant there were “more means to ‘cultify’ films.”<sup>247</sup> As a result, cult cinema grew rapidly. Its new institutions came to include festivals like the Chiller Theater Expo and the Brussels International Festival of Fantastic Film, with similar events sweeping across Europe, Asia, and the Americas since the 1980s. (Cult offerings old and new have also had a place at traditional festivals, where they have often been cordoned into midnight slots.<sup>248</sup>) In the U.S., these institutions have included high-profile “zines” like Michael Weldon’s *Psychotronic Video* and low-profile rags like Bill Landis’s *Sleazoid Express*. Eventually, of course, these institutions would even include Internet sites like Softcore Reviews, b-independent, and Bloody Disgusting, whose proliferation has greatly expanded cult subcultures.

What is more, since the 1980s, the study of cult cinema has taken its place in the academy as most of the grand theories have broken down, prompting a partial turn away from traditional auteur study and from psychoanalytic theory toward a more historical, culturalist analysis whose aim is to reintegrate all genres and tastes, including the most déclassé. This academic process has correlated with the growth of cultural studies and the publication of landmark works on popular genres like horror (e.g., Noël Carroll’s *The Philosophy of Horror* [1990], Carol Clover’s *Men, Women, and Chain Saws* [1992], and Joan Hawkins’s *Cutting Edge* [2000], among others), pornography (see Linda Williams’s *Hard Core* [1989] and my own *Soft In the Middle* [2006]), and exploitation (e.g., Eric Schaefer’s “*Bold! Daring! Shocking! True!*” [1999]). Today, the most cited article on

cult remains Jeffrey Sconce's 1995 *Screen* article "'Trashing' the Academy," which explained how cult participants could seem adversarial and dominated at the same time, while the most cited books include *Defining Cult Movies* and *The Cult Film Reader*. Thus, it is no wonder that today's most influential theory, Pierre Bourdieu's *Distinction: A Social Critique of the Judgment of Taste* (1979), has a decidedly culturalist bent. Along with academic sites in Great Britain, like the Cult Film Archive at University College Northampton and the Centre for Research into Extreme and Alternative Media at the University of Wales, these activities have led to the consensus that cult cinema, in all its trashiness, has much to teach scholars about modern culture.

### Cult Production and Cult Consumption

When I talk about "cult production," I am not talking about movie production *per se*. I am talking about the creation of the illegitimate value system or "aura" that suffuses cult forums and films. Here a few distinctions help. The first distinguishes intentional cult production by cult directors and promoters from unintentional cult production by hapless low-budget directors or by directors whose movies, whether successful or not, have been appropriated as cult objects against their makers' manifest wishes. In the U.S., intentional cult production is a comparatively recent phenomenon that has gained traction only since the 1980s. Hence, intentional cult directors like Troma's Lloyd Kaufman often operate today out of the low-budget industrial sectors promoted by grassroots cult institutions. But there are also higher-budget cult directors to consider; in the U.S., these directors include celebrities like George Romero, Wes Craven, Robert Rodriguez, and Quentin Tarantino. Because this form of production is so reception-oriented, we must also identify

executive producers like Roger Corman and Michael Raso, distributors like Something Weird, and magazines like *Fangoria* as intentional cult producers. Without the extremely specialized audiences that these promoters have assembled, cult directors would have less incentive to produce intentional cult movies in this field.

Unintentional cult production does not, by contrast, qualify as cult production in the sense outlined above, for it does not involve directors or promoters who knowingly apply illegitimate values to their movies with the intention of creating cult movies. Many of the best known cult directors, including Ed Wood, actually qualify as unintentional cult directors—for in celebrated cult classics like *Glen or Glenda* (1953) or *Plan 9 From Outer Space* (1959), Wood was a hapless outsider trying in hilarious ways to make the best movies that he could with little experience or funding. Some of these unintentional cult producers transformed into intentional cult producers over the course of their long careers—which was arguably true of Wood, and which was definitely true of Corman. This cult avant-garde, so to speak, spawned cult cinema. While these cult producers could not at first have imagined the outcomes of their efforts, they were savvy enough to take advantage of those results. The other kind of unintentional cult production is much less friendly to cult cinema. This involves movies appropriated after production from very different contexts. They include everything from Robert Wiene's movie *Das cabinet des Dr. Caligari* (1919) and Leni Riefenstahl's *Triumph of the Will* (1935) to David Lynch's *Eraserhead* (1976) and James Cameron's *Titanic* (1997). In all these cases, we may look on the original producers of these films as unintentional cult producers, thus leaving the primary responsibility for their cult status to the secondary distributors and consumers who over time promoted the cult value of these works.

We also need to make an important distinction between cult consumption and the traditional reception of art, which is often identified with art cinema. There is no question that the neo-Kantian ideal of aesthetic disinterest is the linchpin of any legitimate movie aesthetic.<sup>249</sup> What is pertinent here is that disinterest is tied to “close attention,” a viewing posture that aids immersion, allowing viewers to gather as much of a work’s detail as possible. The ideal of disinterest is also useful to authorities and institutions in that it justifies and maintains social control; it has been thought that training people to adopt this posture cultivates everything from fair play to individual restraint in public places, like crowded museums and, of course, art houses. For these practical reasons, disinterest has always been tied to ideals of refinement and spirituality.

Cult consumption opposes “the aesthetic attitude.” Indeed, cult consumption has long been celebrated as a class-oriented rejection of this high-art posture. This rejection may be seen in the boisterous, populist behaviors that have typified cult consumption in public. Thus, screenings of midnight movies like *Freaks* (1932), *Reefer Madness* (1936), *Mom and Dad* (1945), *El Topo* (1970), *The Rocky Horror Picture Show* (1975), and *The Toxic Avenger* (1984) have traditionally been known for the carnivalesque hullabaloo that they have inspired in audiences. (Indeed, the cult audiences that I have witnessed here in Chicago seem unified by the need to laugh and laugh freely; they seem most pleased that they can laugh without any regard for appropriateness.<sup>250</sup>) It is no surprise, then, that this mode of consumption has alarmed traditional auteurs (e.g., Peter Greenaway), who have always argued that the aesthetic object should be the single determinant of the cinematic experience. The last thing that an auteur, in the classic sense, wants to do is to encourage viewers to seize control of the cinematic experience, which seems to be the goal of cult cinema’s egalitarian, interactive modes of consumption.

But we should also remember that cult cinema, including cult consumption, offers a form of oppositionalism that is more nostalgic than militant. Thus, it is more interested in imagining and celebrating an egalitarian past than in fighting to create a more utopian present. This is evident in the fact that cult’s populist modes of consumption became self-conscious about thirty years ago when the *déclassé* films now linked to the cult sensibility began shifting from the public, theatrical modes of viewing to a less threatening mode of private home viewing. In other words, the cult sensibility coalesced around this notion of active public consumption at the same time that the public side of movie consumption was becoming a thing of the past.<sup>251</sup> This nostalgic sense of a lost cinematic community is

also present in cult's current Internet orientation. The Internet has given cult fans new ways of forming communities and of registering their views in forums and user reviews. But this experience has most often been private, taking place in front of home computers, so it has guaranteed little in the way of flesh-and-blood togetherness—and almost nothing in the way of social protest or (sub)cultural revolution. In my view, then, there is nothing aggressive here, particularly given how dominated most aspects of cult cinema actually are. Cult fans might style themselves as militants, as subcultural “avengers” of some sort, but cult cinema as a collective whole doesn't threaten consumer culture. Instead, it tends to reinforce that culture. Indeed, rather than fighting for cultural hegemony, cult cinema and the sensibility it sanctions seem to be jostling for cultural space, trying to maintain their commercial viability as a distinct consumer identity.

### Cult Canonization, Cult Auteurism, and Cult-Art Forms

In “Arts of Seduction” (2000), Geoffrey Miller counsels evolutionary theorists to take a “bottom-up” view of art, discouraging them from focusing “on the fine arts and their elite world”; instead, he thinks theorists should focus on the full anthropological diversity of art-making, including everything from body painting to the art practices of “various subcultures within our society.”<sup>252</sup> But what about those subcultural sectors that have a high-low identity? During the postwar period, the high-art ideal penetrated cult subcultures through auteurism. Because the cult art cinemas that resulted from this subcultural penetration may be conceptualized as “the bottom of the top” as well as “the top of the bottom,” cult theorists will have a very difficult time separating bottom-up views of cult cinema from top-down views of the same.

To understand all this, we must consider where we might locate a cult art cinema and how we might identify it within the confusing diversity of cult cinema. By definition, a cult art movie seems to have, or aspire to, two kinds of status: cult value and high-art value. Thus, it is found in the overlap of cult cinema and art cinema. This illegitimate or quasi-legitimate strain of art movie may be identified the same way that we identify more legitimate art movies: by presenting evidence of cult canonization and cult auteurism. But here cult art cinema creates special problems. Though cult cinephiles have long sought to devise, in the words of Mathijs and Mendik, “an alternative canon of cinema, pitched against the ‘official’ canon,”<sup>253</sup> we cannot assume that this canon amounts to cult cinema’s high art. A canonical cult movie is usually considered a “cult classic,” but these classics come in many varieties, most of which are *not* ascribed high-art value. This is true of Henenlotter’s movies and Troma’s gross-out comedies; it is also true of single American cult classics, from Herschell Gordon Lewis’s *Blood Feast* (1963) to John Carpenter’s *They Live* (1988), Lloyd Kaufman’s *Tromeo and Juliet* (1996), Jay Lee’s *Zombie Strippers* (2008), and even Raimi’s vaunted *Evil Dead* movies (1981, 1987). As it turns out, the cult-cinema canon has relied on a variety of criteria, which are loose and which may derive from many quarters. This is why cult cinema is so rich, so byzantine—and it is why its canons are in a rapid and continual state of flux.

On the other hand, the institutions of cult cinema have, as noted, grown over the past thirty years. With this increasing institutionalization has come a growing stability. During this period, a great many books, magazines, festivals, and websites have been devoted to the cult sensibility, with a few having proved so enduring that they are now recognized as *ad hoc* institutions unto themselves. (To cite a few examples, consider the

institutional effects of Jonathan Rosenbaum and J. Hoberman's critical study *Midnight Movies* [1983], V. Vale and Andrea Juno's book *Incredibly Strange Films* [1986], and Gary Morris's magazine-turned-website *Bright Lights Film Journal*.) The presence of this literature has made it possible to distinguish the cult art movie from other kinds of cult classic. Thus, to make these distinctions, we should first peruse the many academic collections in the field, from *The Cult Film Reader* and *Defining Cult Movies* to *Unruly Pleasures* (2000), *Underground U.S.A.* (2002), *Alternative Europe* (2004), and *Sleaze Artists* (2007). By looking at the movies most often cited here, theorists may get a sense of what this cult canon has been held to be over time by fans, critics, and institutions, all with the advantage of academic reliability. After we have achieved these goals, we will be in a better position to make distinctions between cult art movies and other classics. Then we will need to lean heavily on the distinctions that we drew earlier in this chapter between intentional and unintentional forms of auteurism.

Before stressing three intentional kinds of cult classic, I want to discount two other kinds that represent unintentional forms of auteurism. The first unintentional type involves cult art movies that have been appropriated from other spheres by cult fans. The cult canon has often included experimental cinemas, mainstream cinemas, and world cinemas that were originally made and celebrated far from cult cinema as we think of it today. These movies, all of which I consider "cult classics," include the aforementioned *Des cabinet des Dr. Caligari*, *Triumph of the Will*, *Eraserhead*, and *Titanic* as well as Luis Buñuel's *Un chien andalou* (1929); Riefenstahl's *Olympia* (1938); Orson Welles's *Touch of Evil* (1958); Jean-Luc Godard's *Le week-end* (1967); Stanley Kubrick's *A Clockwork Orange* (1971); Stan Brakhage's *The Act of Seeing with One's Own Eyes*

(1971); David Cronenberg's *Videodrome* (1983), *Dead Ringers* (1988), and *Crash* (1996); John Dahl's *The Last Seduction* (1994); the Coens' *Big Lebowski* (1998); Richard Kelly's *Donnie Darko* (2001); and Peter Jackson's *Lord of the Rings* franchise (2001-2003), to cite just a few. The overlaps with more legitimate cinemas in evidence in this comparatively brief list demonstrate that the cult sensibility has hardly been restricted to movies that were inexpensive to make or that have only ever enjoyed a lowbrow status, which has been cult cinema's principal classification since about 1980. Instead, cult tastes are *underground* tastes that may "cultify" any movies or auteurs gathered from any sector so long as the process is directed by subcultural audiences who embrace subcultural values and practice illegitimate modes of consumption. If we blend these ideas of cult with the understanding that cult auteurism is often unintentional, we can reconcile two seemingly opposing facts: on the one hand, auteurs like Welles, Brakhage, and Kubrick were traditional auteurs whose allegiance was to a traditional aesthetic; and, on the other, some of their movies have been praised as cult classics.

This kind of cult appropriation and elevation amounts to a populist intervention that forcibly reappraises a movie that may have failed in legitimate forums or that may have fallen out of favor with mainstream critics—a description that applies as readily to recent indie films like *The Last Seduction* and *Donnie Darko* as to Hollywood classics like *Touch of Evil*. *The Last Seduction* and *Donnie Darko* were both mid-budget indie art films that initially failed in legitimate channels: *The Last Seduction* at first failed to find a theatrical distributor, while *Donnie Darko* failed to earn back its production financing in its first go-round in theaters.<sup>254</sup> But in both cases, these movies earned an underground cult following in their non-theatrical releases that gave them a chance for a successful re-

release in theatrical art houses, which in turn allowed them to earn even more money in their subsequent releases to ancillary windows. It is as if the people spoke—and though their voice has always been deemed “illegitimate” in legitimate sectors, it lent these films an unintentional cult status that led to box-office successes and to positive reappraisals by traditional critics, ironically salvaging their legitimacy.

The second type of cult art movie that I want to put to the side is the kind of cult movie that results from the fetishization of directorial incompetence, i.e., “badfilm.”<sup>255</sup> There is absolutely nothing wrong with celebrating a “bad” movie. But I do think that it is important to realize what we are doing when we call bad movies “art movies.” The idea of auteurism implies control, purity, individuality, and intentional aspiration—and cult auteurism implies these notions as much as any other kind. Thus, it is possible to modify existing auteur methods to identify cult art cinema and cult art movies. Of course, given that cult cinema glorifies its own low-budget incompetence, it is no wonder that external observers have often mocked the very idea of identifying cult auteurs and cult art movies. But this mockery may be undercut by pointing out that opponents of cult cinema are seldom familiar with the traditions of the cult genres and the cult subcultures that they mock. Thus, they often confuse adherence to cult convention with straight ineptitude—as, for example, when anti-porn critics laugh at softcore cinema’s narrative-number form, which is only the genre’s most fundamental convention.

But I think that we can only rarely construct cult auteurism and the cult art movie in terms of the bad movie, which is a pleasurable failure, a *tour de force* ineptitude. To me, this cult tradition is most often a sign of an unintentional, or an accidental, auteurism that is an effect of movie promotion and consumption in the main. Of course, some cult

movies that qualify for so-bad-they're-good status have been made that way on purpose. Here we might consider Russ Meyer's *Mudhoney* (1965), Jess Franco's *Vampyros Lesbos* (1971), John Waters's *Pink Flamingos* (1972), Nobuhiko Obayashi's *House* (1977), the transgressive shorts that Richard Kern made between 1983 and 1993, Rodriguez's *Planet Terror* (2007), Anna Biller's *Viva* (2007), and so on. The bad movie and cult auteurism clearly do go together here, for the intentional irony of such works means that we do not have to call them "bad" in any straightforward sense; rather, they seem rich in complex effects that their creators intended. Although we may be able to align such movies with the cult of pleasurable bad taste, we cannot align them with directorial ineptitude—for their directors found a way to do what they wanted to do within their constraints. But the more common kind of bad movie—where the laughter seems to work against directors, not with them, and where the irony is a function of the viewers and their environment—does not seem to exemplify the auteur ideal in any sense.

One of the problems here is that intentional badness is typically disowned by bad cult directors. Certainly, the first generation of bad cult directors—individuals like Wood, Doris Wishman, Larry Buchanan, and Andy Milligan, who have all been celebrated in critical forums as intentional auteurs—did not fetishize their own incompetence. Indeed, there is often very little evidence beyond these directors' embrace of what others have defined as their "trashy" aesthetics to support the idea that they were trying to make pleurably horrid movies. For the most part, then, their auteurism is a product of cult consumption, not cult production—which means they are better positioned as significant "failures" whose technical and stylistic incompetence influenced later directors, like Jim Wynorski and Henenlotter. But not even the later directors have consistently promoted

themselves in terms of an ironic control that may function as a subculturally legitimate sign of auteurism. They might see themselves as “unimportant” and they might glorify bad taste and cheap things, but they don’t often take explicit pleasure in the bad cinematic qualities imparted by their own incompetence. Bad auteurs become bad auteurs, it seems, despite themselves, with their authoritative ineptitude a product of certain styles of cult consumption and evaluation. This dynamic reminds us of cult cinema’s audience-driven ethic. But it is so far from the traditional that it is worth asking whether the idea of the unintentional bad auteur makes sense in broader contexts.

As noted, when it comes to intentional cult art movies, there are at least three main types to talk about (including intentional “bad” films). The thing that seems to unify these three types is their ambivalence about their cult identity, an ambivalence that seems to be a function of their makers’ high-art aspirationalism—which is forever qualified, it appears, by a metaphorical asterisk. Perhaps the best example of this ambivalence involves new cult movies that have “too much legitimacy” as a result of their provenance. This particular cult phenomenon is most evident on the festival circuit, where Bong Joon-ho, Tomas Alfredson, Tarantino, Park Chan-wook, Lars von Trier, and others have lately released movies that might well be classified as “cult art films.” In their production values, distribution, and overall prestige, movies like Bong’s moody toxic-creature film *The Host* (2006), Alfredson’s equally moody vampire movie *Let the Right One In* (2008), Tarantino’s riotous Nazi-revenge picture *Inglourious Basterds* (2009), Park’s vampire comedy *Thirst* (2009), and von Trier’s torture-porn meditation *Antichrist* (2009) are first and last traditional art films. They have won awards, critical acclaim, and global distribution through their mastery of the devices of traditional art films and through the

reputations of their makers. Indeed, these directors are all veterans of the festival circuit, where they have served on juries and have made regular appearances at Cannes. The thing that distinguishes their new movies as *cult* art movies, then, is generic content: the severed body parts, the chills and thrills and spasms of violence, the monsters. Or, more precisely, the thing that has made these movies “cult art movies” is that their genre-coded materials are still not always accepted by traditionalists. Indeed, though horror films and sex films are regular parts of traditional festivals, these genres continue to face resistance from conservative cinephiles and critics. (See Joan Hawkins’ apt critique of how Park’s award-winning gore fests have been received by traditional critics like Manohla Dargis of *The New York Times*.<sup>256</sup>) Thus, there is still an argument for labeling these art films “cult” movies on a formal basis, even if they remain by necessity a distinguished kind of cult art film that is more legitimate than illegitimate. But this argument is fading, for traditional critics have recently been depicting cult violence as more of the same, perceiving in it the tedium of art-world tradition. (See David Ansen’s *Newsweek* essay “Shock and Yawn” [2009].<sup>257</sup>) I suspect that once all of the critics and institutions have been converted, these art films won’t be able to function as cult movies at all.

A more sustainable, albeit still ambivalent, cult-art identity is evident in the quasi-legitimate films of auteurs like Mario Bava and Dario Argento, most of whose work has been released through illegitimate cult-movie mechanisms and not through legitimate art-film mechanisms—but whose work has since then gathered acclaim in both illegitimate *and* legitimate circles. Here we might want to step back and think about the cult nexus as a loose collection of low-budget genres that in the U.S. has for the past thirty years actively promoted itself as a “cult” area. Given how accepted this practice has become,

with whole institutions being devoted to this idea of a low-budget cult sector of movie-making, we might well say that *all* of the movies produced in these illegitimate spheres have some loose claim to the label “cult movie” just as an art movie that manages to navigate its way through legitimate art-film channels has some automatic claim to the label “art film.” Needless to say, cult movies that arrive through these means have not earned any cult-classic status, let alone any high-art status—but they are free to begin earning this status subculturally. Thus, cult auteurs, like traditional auteurs, seek praise for their movies through critics, viewers, and institutions, albeit in channels defined as illegitimate. Indeed, the most respected films of many auteurs currently deemed “quasi-legitimate” (including Bava, Corman, Meyer, Koji Wakamatsu, George Romero, Radley Metzger, Wes Craven, The Mitchell Brothers, Wakefield Poole, Gerard Damiano, Tobe Hooper, Just Jaeckin, Obayashi, Argento, Tinto Brass, Andrew Blake, Eli Roth, Nacho Cerdà, and others) were shortly after their production almost fully identified with their illegitimate cult auteurism and with their illegitimate embrace of genre-branded materials and genre-branded distributions. But as these movies achieved classic status within the cult nexus, the trend over time has been for them to become detached from their original distribution channels and their native subgenres, freeing them to develop new affiliations with legitimate institutions, including art-cinema institutions. Hence, legitimate forums like museum archives, repertory theaters, and crossover magazines like *Sight & Sound* (whose recent article, “The Mad, the Bad, and the Dangerous,” identified many of these films as auteur vehicles) have frequently been among the very first forums to promote the canonical value of these movies and their auteurs at the cultural level, where they have in a very qualified sense coalesced as “the bottom of the top.”<sup>258</sup>

If we made a list of admired movies by these and other quasi-legitimate auteurs, we would find many cult classics that have been admired culturally and/or subculturally for their aesthetics, for their contributions to the art of cinema. These movies include *Black Sabbath* (1963), *The Evil Eye* (1963), *Blood and Black Lace* (1964); *The Masque of the Red Death* (1964); *Faster, Pussycat! Kill! Kill!* (1965); *Secrets Behind the Wall* (1965); *Night of the Living Dead* (1968); *Camille 2000* (1969) and *The Opening of Misty Beethoven* (1975); *Last House on the Left* (1972); *Behind the Green Door* (1972); *Bijou* (1972); *The Devil in Miss Jones* (1973); *The Texas Chainsaw Massacre* (1974); *Histoire d'O* (1975); *House* (1977); *Suspiria* (1977), *Tenebre* (1982), and *Do You Like Hitchcock?* (2005); *La chiave* (1983); *Paris Chic* (1997) and *Hard Edge* (2003); *Hostel* (2005); and “Aftermath” (1994) and *The Abandoned* (2006). In addition to these quasi-legitimate classics, we could also add the Hollywood classics of cult directors like Samuel Fuller, including *Shock Corridor* (1963), *The Naked Kiss* (1964), and *White Dog* (1982), and the high-art canons of cult Hollywood genres, like film noir. Indeed, we could even add the slashers and torture-porn movies that have recently arrived from France, such as *Dans ma peau* (2002), *Haute tension* (2003), *Frontière(s)* (2007), *À l'intérieur* (2007), and *Martyrs* (2008), along with certain Japanese pinks, including *The Glamorous Life of Sachiko Hanai* (2004). Praised as auteur vehicles and lumped into movements (e.g., the “New Wave of French horror” and the “pink nouvelle vague”), these films are quasi-legitimate examples of cult art cinema. When we add them and other cases to our idea of art cinema, we drastically re-orient traditional idea of the genre, expanding it quantitatively and qualitatively. However, in making these additions, we must remember that it is legitimate critics who have always been most responsible for

the elevation of these movies. That is, it was legitimate critics from forums like *Sight & Sound* or *The Village Voice* who most directly canonized “the film noir high end” by praising movies like “Jacques Tourneur’s quietist *Out of the Past* (1947)” over the more “pulpy inventions” of more lowbrow noir classics like “Edgar G. Ulmer’s low-end *Detour* (1945).”<sup>259</sup>

But there is another kind of cult art movie, one that does not depend on legitimate critics for its status—for a cult art movie does not have to be recognized by outsiders in order to function as art cinema *within* a cult subculture. Cult promoters, cult critics, and cult institutions are more than capable of making value distinctions among cult movies on their own. To get a sense of the true scope of the art cinema super-genre, then, we must acquaint ourselves with sectors that legitimate critics rarely, if ever, visit—sectors that we might consider “the top of the bottom.” Thus, if we focused on contemporary American softcore, for example, we would find a cult auteur like Tony Marsiglia, whose value is beyond dispute according to sites like b-independent, Softcore Reviews, and Alternative Cinema. Thus, we would have to integrate ultra-low-budget, cult-softcore movies like *Lust for Dracula* (2004), *Chantal* (2006), *Sinful* (2007), and *Suzie Heartless* (2009) into our notion of art cinema. We would also have to add a number of very different auteur vehicles, like Tom Lazarus’s corporate-softcore films, *Word of Mouth* (1999) and *House of Love* (2000). From there, we could move to Spanish exploitation and look at the work of independent horror auteur Franco, whose output is often praised in cult circles but is rarely recognized outside them. Franco’s low-budget films, though often confusing, have achieved a patina of the personal through the passage of time and their insistent swirls of psychosexual incoherence. Or we might study American hardcore by looking at single

videos, like Gregory Dark's *New Wave Hookers* (1985), or entire *oeuvres*, like that of Michael Ninn. As a subculture, the adult industry seems to value Ninn movies like *Latex* (1995) over the "prestige" hardcore of the higher-profile Blake.

These lists could go on and on. But there is no reason to enumerate every auteur and "masterpiece." Nor do we need to perform formalist inquiries, surveying cult cinema for traditional art-cinema techniques (like disinterested stylization, *temps mort*, the long take, the tracking shot, slow pacing, etc.) or cult mutations of these elite techniques. Cult art movies clearly exist, as certified by the fact that movies in so many lowbrow forms—including the Italo-Spanish spaghetti western, the Japanese pink, the Italian giallo, the British Hammer film, the American torture-porn movie, and the Hong Kong martial-arts film, to name just a few—have functioned as high art in the subcultures that have grown up around them. When made, circulated, and praised with flair, cult art movies have even generated a qualified status outside those subcultures.<sup>260</sup>

What I find interesting is that even the least recognized cult-art auteurs seem at best ambivalent about their cult identities. Such auteurs often have little recognition and no prestige outside their subcultures and seem confined to the cult nexus—and sometimes happily, since at times they have so little capital that they can only express gratitude to their backers for giving their work distribution at all. But there is an important sense in which these directors resemble auteurs with a quasi-legitimate or even legitimate status: they are aspirational. As a result, they can't help having mixed feelings about their cult identity, which in most sectors functions as a psychological asterisk that qualifies their artistic status. This is because auteurs like Marsiglia, Lazarus, Franco, Dark, and Ninn count themselves as artists first and cult artists second.<sup>261</sup> It is probable, then, that they

would all be happy to leave the cult world behind if the canonical processes that elevated them within that world began to push them away from it, leading them, like Argento, to greater recognition and opportunity in legitimate cultural locations. Not only would this wider canonization help these illegitimate auteurs make a deeper impression on cinema history, it would help them partially remove their asterisk.

Unfortunately, no matter how ready they are to transcend their cult origins, even auteurs like Argento tend in the final analysis to be defined by the provenance of their most highly praised films; it is that subculture and its distribution context that becomes a permanent part of their reputations. Thus, if the acme of their careers was produced in a cult subculture, these auteurs will probably never lose their cult status entirely—not even if that cinema has functioned as a kind of high art. Indeed, in such cases, that status seems even more likely to stick, to hang over them like an asterisk.

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<sup>238</sup> Andrea Juno, “Interview: Frank Henenlotter,” *Incredibly Strange Films*, ed. V. Vale and Andrea Juno (1986; San Francisco: Re/Search, 1988), p. 17.

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Ernest Mathijs and Xavier Mendik, “Editorial Introduction: What Is Cult Film?,” *The Cult Film Reader*, ed. Ernest Mathijs and Xavier Mendik (New York: Open University Press, 2008), p. 11.

<sup>240</sup> Mark Jancovich *et al.*, “Introduction,” *Defining Cult Movies*, ed. Mark Jancovich *et al.* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2003), pp. 1-2.

<sup>241</sup> This point of view is evident throughout *Defining Cult Movies* and was to my knowledge first proposed by Jeffrey Sconce. See Jeffrey Sconce, “‘Trashing the Academy’: Taste, Excess, and an Emerging Politics of Cinematic Style,” *Screen*, vol. 36, no. 4 (Winter 1995), pp. 371-393.

<sup>242</sup> The Softcore Reviews website demonstrates that the cult world’s dominated nature is often made tangible through embarrassment and self-consciousness. The cult reviewers of this site construct their own criteria for softcore evaluation, but then they repeatedly mock these, reinforcing the dominance of more traditional criteria and undercutting their own. See David Andrews, *Soft in the Middle: The Contemporary Softcore Feature in its Contexts* (Columbus: Ohio State University Press, 2006), pp. 199-204.

<sup>243</sup> See Mark Jancovich, “Cult Fictions: Cult Movies, Subcultural Capital and the Production of Cultural Distinctions” (2002), *The Cult Film Reader*, ed. Ernest Mathijs and Xavier Mendik (New York: Open University Press, 2008), p. 151.

<sup>244</sup> For example, see Joan Hawkins, *Cutting Edge: Art-Horror and the Horrific Avant-garde*, University of Minnesota Press (Minneapolis, 2000); and Mark Betz, “Art, Exploitation, Underground,” *Defining Cult Movies*, ed. Mark Jancovich *et al.* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2003), pp. 202-222.

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<sup>245</sup> On cult cinema's oppositionalism, see Sconce, "Trashing the Academy," p. 381.

<sup>246</sup> Ernest Mathijs and Xavier Mendik, "The Concepts of Cult: Introduction," *The Cult Film Reader*, ed. Ernest Mathijs and Xavier Mendik (New York: Open University Press, 2008), p. 20.

<sup>247</sup> For one example of this institutional growth, see Bill Landis's account of why he became a grindhouse chronicler and tastemaker. Bill Landis and Michelle Clifford, *Sleazoid Express: A Mind-Twisting Tour Through the Grindhouse Cinema of Times Square* (New York: Fireside, 2002), p. xii.

<sup>248</sup> For example, see Mike Hale's discussion of "Cinemanía" offerings at Tribeca. Mike Hale, "The Underside of a Film Festival, Where Some Dark Treasures Dwell," *New York Times*, online edition, April 22, 2010: 1-2. Available at <<http://www.nytimes.com/2010/04/23/movies/23cinemanía.html?8dpc>>. √ Accessed April 22, 2010.

<sup>249</sup> See Chapter Two, particularly notes 57-61.

<sup>250</sup> I recently verified this observation at a Chicago screening of Nobuhiko Obayashi's *House* (1977), which took place on March 3, 2010, at 8:00 pm at the Gene Siskel Film Center, a venue that is both a first-run art house and a repertory theater. The packed hipster audience had been primed to laugh by months of promo campaigns and by word-of-mouth—and thus it was laughing boisterously at the trailers and advertisements even before the movie began. To get a different glimpse of what cult interactivity and populism can mean in the context of art cinema, see *All the Love You Cannes!* (2002), which is Lloyd Kaufman's documentary about Troma's experience at the globally renowned film festival.

<sup>251</sup> The cult nexus also fetishizes the substance of film and its modes of projection; and, more recently, cult insiders have begun to similarly fetishize video and VHS-viewing.

<sup>252</sup> Geoffrey Miller, "Arts of Seduction" (2000), *Evolution, Literature, and Film: A Reader*, ed. Brian Boyd, Joseph Carroll, and Jonathan Gottschall (New York: Columbia University Press, 2010), p. 162.

<sup>253</sup> Mathijs and Mendik, "Editorial Introduction," p. 6.

<sup>254</sup> For more on *Donnie Darko*'s cult-indie status, see Michael Z. Newman, *Indie: An American Film Culture* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2011), p. 211-213.

<sup>255</sup> This "bad" aesthetic is traced in the aforementioned research by Sconce, Jancovich, Mathijs, and Mendik; it is also discussed from a non-academic point of view by Landis and Clifford.

<sup>256</sup> Joan Hawkins, "Culture Wars: Some New Trends in Art Horror," *Jump Cut*, no. 51 (Spring 2009), pp. 1-3. <<http://www.ejumpcut.org/currentissue/artHorror/index.html>>. Accessed, June 18, 2009.

<sup>257</sup> David Ansen, "Shock and Yawn," *Newsweek* (October 26, 2009), pp. 48-50.

<sup>258</sup> Mark Cousins *et al.*, "The Mad, the Bad, and the Dangerous," *Sight & Sound*, vol. 19, issue 9 (September 2009), pp. 22-36. In the U.S., early signs of cult eclecticism have been evident at a number of traditional art-cinema institutions, including early film festivals as well as in exhibition contexts like the Museum of Modern Art, which has been famous for seemingly legitimating the most illegitimate forms. For further discussion, see Haidee Wasson, *Museum Movies: The Museum of Modern Art and the Birth of Art Cinema* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2005) and Barbara Wilinsky, *Sure Seaters: The Emergence of Art House Cinema* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2001).

<sup>259</sup> Kent Jones, review of *Out of the Past* (1997), *The Village Voice Film Guide: 50 Years of Movies from Classics to Cult Hits*, ed. Dennis Lim (New York: Wiley, 2007), p. 188. On film noir, see James Naremore, *More than Night: Film Noir in its Contexts* (1998; Berkeley: University of California Press, 2008).

<sup>260</sup> Thus, though scholars like Sconce and Nathan Hunt take it for granted that the capital of a given cult sector works only *in* that sector, this is not always the case regarding the high-art canons of that sector. The subcultural capital of cult art movies has a limited "cultural" dimension, for it is accepted in other cult sectors and sometimes beyond the cult nexus as whole. See, for example, Nathan Hunt, "The Importance of Trivia: Ownership, Exclusion, and Authority in Science Fiction Fandom," *Defining Cult Movies*, ed. Mark Jancovich, *et al.* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2003), p. 198.

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<sup>261</sup> These opinions are supported *vis-à-vis* Metzger, Dark (a.k.a., Greg Hippolyte), Lazarus, and Marsiglia, respectively, in David Andrews, *The Contemporary Softcore Feature in its Contexts* (Columbus: Ohio State University Press, 2006), pp. 34-37, 143-146, 218-227, 246-249.

## Chapter Seven / Revisiting “The Two Avant-Gardes”

In 1975, Peter Wollen published his article “The Two Avant-Gardes” in *Studio International*.<sup>262</sup> There he proposed that two experimental cinemas were at work in Europe, with one centered around a coop movement of avant-garde filmmakers like Peter Gidal, Malcolm Le Grice, and Birgit Hein and the other around experimental auteurs like Jean-Luc Godard and the team of Jean-Marie Straub and Danièle Huillet, all of whom usually worked in a more commercial, feature format that typically relied on narrative. Wollen argued that the New American Cinema was the model for the first European avant-garde but that America lacked the second type. Though this last observation seemed to neglect classic experimental American auteurs both major (e.g., John

Cassavetes) and minor (Susan Sontag), Wollen's piece is a good one whose virtues have continued to make it useful today, judging from how well-cited it remains.

But so much has changed since 1975 that Wollen's essay is now clearly ripe for an update. In pursuing this goal, however, we should revise his methods along with his coverage. For it is not clear that his avant-gardes were ever comparable at the ontological level. This is no knock on Wollen, whose public-intellectual purposes were adapted to a set of politics that weren't academic in the same sense as mine. But since it is academics who cite "The Two Avant-Gardes," we should consider the epistemological implications of its method. Wollen compared a large, inclusive, and institutional avant-garde tradition that was defined by its alternative distribution to a more exclusive, political, art-historical tradition that was defined by its Wauteurs, critics, and intellectuals. This isn't to deny that this second tradition had a reality as a concept; indeed, there is evidence that this concept has expanded since 1975 such that it may now cover even more experimental auteurs in Europe, Asia, the Americas, and elsewhere. But this second tradition is *mainly* political, evaluative, and art-historical. By contrast, Wollen's first avant-garde has, by dint of its alternative distribution scheme, an inarguable institutional reality of its own; this has allowed it to develop clear internal traditions. In the U.S., these developments have made it possible to see this avant-garde as now loosely divided into two fluidly interconnected coop communities: the grassroots communities that have gathered around DIY spaces, microcinemas, Internet lounges, and "hipster" scenes and the more institutionalized (or "university-made") avant-gardes that have operated through colleges, museums, and the major media arts centers, all of which have relied to an extent on government subsidies.<sup>263</sup> Of course, these avant-gardes cannot be fully differentiated. Often, the more established

institutions have DIY roots, and individual participants can simultaneously play roles in both spheres. Still, in American experimental cinema, there is a definite perception that a schism separates these spheres; this perception has in turn played an outsized role in the signature discourses that have shaped this avant-garde cinema.

In the final sections of this chapter, I theorize these avant-gardes, paying heed to how they differ from the avant-gardes as framed by Wollen. To make this concrete, I analyze recent scholarship on the subject, including Kathryn Ramey's article "Between Art, Industry and Academia" (2002) and Michael Zryd's article "The Academy and the Avant-Garde" (2006). These valuable pieces, which apply ethnographic (Ramey) and film-historical (Zryd) methods to their research questions, have helped me generate a new understanding of the coop movement. This understanding is grounded in the avant-garde's anti-institutional logic, which creates an "authenticity problematic" that dogs experimentalists (as well as their promoters, whose interests subtly differ from those of the artists themselves) as they circulate through institutions, eking out careers. But this authenticity problematic has not been a challenge for avant-garde communities alone. It has also been a challenge for the many institutions that support the avant-garde, including the academy. Though the first problematic cannot be helped—it is, after all, an effect of the avant-garde's purist, always marginal cultural position—the second can be untangled and retired on a case-by-case basis as individual avant-gardists reconcile themselves to the values of their supporting institutions. This can be understood in more particular ways by looking at the avant-garde's relationship to the academy.

Art Cinema's Own Art Cinema

My first assumption is that in classifying art, we should recognize whether we are deploying relatively objective or subjective definitions—and we should strive to be as objective as possible. Of course, in the annals of art and aesthetics, there have been many kinds of “objective” and “subjective” definition. In this book, an objective definition is one that construes art inclusively and neutrally as an institution devoted to the production, distribution, and reception of human artworks, artifactual or conceptual. Such definitions make room for the lowest forms of art as well as the highest; they also make room for the most commercial forms as well as the least. The reason art-making is so diverse is that it is deeply ingrained in human nature such that it is as universal to the species as language itself. Objective definitions that accommodate all this diversity divide art into art worlds, schools, movements, genres, periods, and institutions, each of which may be defined through practical indices like mode of production, distribution apparatus, target audience, and political or commercial purpose. An objective definition is capable of reflecting that different art worlds, art institutions, and artists engage in cultural competition, attempting to claim art’s “authenticity” for themselves. But objective definitions must recognize the reality of these competitions without crediting their values—for in this sort of definition, every work of human art is authentic, from the child’s earliest crayon scribbles to the Renaissance master’s finest chiaroscuro flourishes. Obviously, the story is different *vis-à-vis* the subjective definition. Subjective definitions of art regularly define art exclusively, limiting this label to preferred institutions, privileged art worlds, and politically correct artworks; consequently, these definitions have often had evaluative connotations, such that the term “art” is a sign of a value or status in a “higher” field of artistic endeavor, not a classification that covers the full spectrum of art practices.

For most of modern history, subjective definitions of art have prevailed in western culture. This has in effect made art theory and art history an adjunct of art criticism. But since the 1950s, new theories have come to dominate Anglo-American aesthetics. These include the open-concept approach to art, the institutional theory of art, the historical (or “narrative”) approach to art, and others. Innovative ideas have also been forwarded by genre theorists using historical methods, like Rick Altman, and by cultural theorists using sociological methods, like Pierre Bourdieu and Howard Becker.<sup>264</sup> These theorists have managed to frame art’s subjective indices within objective ones. I have furthered these trends by conceptualizing art cinema as a multi-generic high art in the larger artistic field of the cinema as a whole. The reason that it is difficult to define a high-art genre like art cinema through an inclusive, objective definition is that the genre seems to define itself through exclusive, subjective means. But theorists should simply build this emphasis on exclusion and value into their definitions. Thus, my definition of art cinema construes the genre in terms of its institutional emphases on exclusiveness, authenticity, and intrinsic value; but at the same time, this definition is diverse and inclusive in its recognition of *all* the different politics and *all* the different subcultures through which art cinema has made its claims to authenticity and value. As a result, my definition of the category covers not only traditional art films but also mainstream art movies and cult art movies—as well as their institutions, which overlap, like the forms themselves. Obviously, this definition of art cinema must also encompass avant-garde cinema, which is frequently designated art cinema’s highest art, that is, as art cinema’s own *art cinema*.<sup>265</sup>

Thus, I define avant-garde cinema as an offshoot of art cinema with a relatively separate place in the genre due to its non-commercial modes of distribution.<sup>266</sup> Clearly,

this anti-commercial character is most evident in the coop avant-gardes, which is why those experimental cinemas were after the 1960s easy to distinguish from more commercial art cinemas. Quite the opposite has been true of the crossover experimental art cinemas of filmmakers like Godard and Straub-Huillet, whose best-known works have come through a relatively politicized, feature-length art-film format distributed through major festivals and more commercial means.<sup>267</sup> Still, even in the coop avant-garde, “semi-autonomy” is a matter of subcultural distinction and not a true divide, for all art cinema aspires to an anti-commercial ideal. It is just that the coop cinemas have managed to objectify this ideal—which they present as a political as well as an aesthetic concern—through an alternative distribution scheme that clearly resists commodity capitalism.

Before reviewing the history of avant-garde cinema, we should say more about the terms most often applied to it, including “avant-garde” and “experimental” as well as “alternative,” “underground,” and “independent.” To be in full accord with the militant implications of “avant-garde,” any cinema that it names should be at the forefront of an artistic tradition that is politically and artistically transgressive; it should also imply an active or *activist* connection to social experience. These expectations form what Jeffrey Skoller has called “the recurring refrain of the twentieth-century historical avant-garde: the problem of integrating social engagement and innovative aesthetic practice.”<sup>268</sup> Still, avant-garde filmmakers have not necessarily *had* to live up to these standards. After all, if survey the history of the field, the idea that avant-gardists *must* be in the vanguard of real political change, or that they must be going somewhere radically new in the sense of form or content or politics, makes little sense. American avant-garde cinema has been marked by a diversity of individual purposes and a diversity of artisanal methods. So while its

resistance to commodity-based media has generally been obvious, its use of experiment as a way of spurring Situationist revolt or as a tool for stirring civil-rights consciousness has been less consistent.<sup>269</sup> Even the idea that the field is always experimental does not easily square with the fact that experimentalists are often pushing forward well-worn, albeit non-commercial and fairly political, art traditions.

These difficulties are not that odd, though, for in art, category designations rarely make perfect sense. And figuring out what sense they *do* make is a question of gaining a wide enough perspective. We know at this point that avant-garde practice in American art cinema has been at its most diverse since 1960. During that span, many terms have been applied to this sector, with “avant-garde” and “experimental” having for some time been used almost interchangeably.<sup>270</sup> This usage is fine, I believe; in fact, that is how I use the terms myself. While it does help to remember that “avant-garde” has more historical specificity than “experimental,” it does not help to get too hung up on the authenticity of our terms. On the other hand, some labels cannot isolate this cinema; these terms include “independent,” “alternative,” and “underground.” Though these labels can describe the avant-garde, each is too broad in its references to distinguish this art cinema,<sup>271</sup> for each may be applied to cinemas that benefit from far more commercial distributions. Ergo, only the terms “avant-garde” and “experimental” serve as fairly reliable labels in this context—with the caveat that a label can isolate a field of art even if that field has never really lived up to the expectations implicit to the label.

The link between avant-garde cinema and art cinema is also historical, rooted in the traditional classification of high-profile avant-garde films of the 1920s and 1930s as “art films” or “art cinema.”<sup>272</sup> But neither the idea of the traditional art film as a feature-

length narrative form nor the idea of it as a new-wave phenomenon coalesced until after the Second World War. It was at that point that today's increasingly specific distinctions emerged.<sup>273</sup> This suggests that the history of experimental cinema is split. The first phase was a prewar period in which European directors were the leaders, the theorists, and the innovators. According to film historian A.L. Rees, this first phase may be subdivided between a "poetic avant-garde," comprised of artists working in an art-world capacity on more-or-less abstract films, and a "narrative avant-garde," comprised of auteurs more closely involved with commercial industries and more likely to rely on some narrative and some realism in their experimental works.<sup>274</sup> In films such as *Le retour à la raison* (Man Ray, 1923), *Symphonie diagonale* (Viking Eggeling, 1924), *Ballet mécanique* (Fernand Léger, Dudley Murphy, 1924), and *Anémic cinema* (Marcel Duchamp, 1926), the artists of the poetic avant-garde constructed a playful, non-commercial cinema that dissolved realistic illusion in montage, abstraction, and surrealist whimsy. The narrative avant-garde included the German Expressionists and "the Soviet school of Eisenstein, Pudovkin, Kuleshov and Shub, the French 'Impressionists' such as Louis Delluc, Jean Epstein and Germaine Dulac, the Japanese director Kinugasa, and independent directors such as Gance, Murnau and Dreyer."<sup>275</sup> This second phase of the avant-garde was more political and far more plot-oriented than the first, as shown by its equivocal relations with photographic realism and with classical narrative. This period also witnessed the birth of crucial American cinemas in both experimental categories, like the one that emerged from the Stieglitz circle through "city symphonies" like *Manhatta* (Paul Strand, Charles Sheeler, 1921). These prewar avant-gardes fell apart for two major reasons: the coming of sound cinema and broader political events. After 1927, the coming of sound—which

avant-gardists first resisted on aesthetic grounds, though their resistance often spoke to economic necessity—contributed to the belief that Hollywood was both technically *and* economically superior.<sup>276</sup> But the most obvious problem facing the avant-garde during the 1930s was the coming war, which sent the European filmmakers into exile, relocating much of the movement and its influence to the U.S.<sup>277</sup>

Recently, David James, Paul Arthur, and Chuck Kleinhans have added flesh to this historical narrative, with James adding insights on the “minor cinemas” around Los Angeles as early as the 1920s.<sup>278, 279</sup> But the second phase of avant-garde cinema—which was contemporary with the rise of auteurism and with the consecration of the commercial art cinema—was clearly North American in character. During this crucial phase, the most influential movement was labeled “the New American Cinema” by Jonas Mekas and his many collaborators.<sup>280</sup> This avant-garde was influenced by the European poetic avant-garde, taking from films like Jean Cocteau’s *Le sang d’un poète* (1932) the belief that cinema was an artist’s medium no less than painting.<sup>281</sup> Its most famous image derived from *Meshes of the Afternoon* (1943), a neo-surrealist work produced by the European-born, American-raised filmmaker Maya Deren and her Czech-exile husband, Alexander Hammid. Deren and colleagues like Stan Brakhage formed the “visionary” phase of this avant-garde, which fused the sexual “psychodrama” of Cocteau to the lyrical modernism of American painting and poetry. Along with Kenneth Anger, Jack Smith, Shirley Clarke, Marie Menken, Jordan Belson, Chick Strand, Bruce Baillie, and many others, Deren and Brakhage pioneered an American underground that was, until the emergence of hardcore, as notorious for its opposition to mainstream sexual culture—and its avid endorsement of the counterculture—as for its opposition to mainstream movie culture. Experimentalists

like Anger and Smith had cult followings, and both fought to keep their films out of the courts.<sup>282</sup> Later, through the intercession of innovators like Andy Warhol, the trance films of the visionary era gave way to structural films like *Wavelength* (1967), by Canadian Michael Snow, and *Zorns Lemma* (1970), by American Hollis Frampton. It was under the cool, disinterested aegis of the structural film that the New American Cinema would make its surest entry into the “pantheon” of high art.

Just as crucial, I think, was Mekas’s collaborative formation in the early 1960s of cooperative distribution. In some ways, this new form of distribution resembled an older system established by the Museum of Modern Art’s circulating film library in 1935; like the later system, the museum library also encouraged the growth of film societies and art cinema as a whole.<sup>283</sup> Moreover, neither system was designed for profit, so they were, in that sense, in keeping with the anti-commercial rhetoric of high art. That said, after its first burst of success, major changes occurred in the American avant-garde. Until the late 1960s and early 1970s, avant-garde movies had been shown almost entirely in theatrical spaces. Whether exhibited in museums or classrooms, coop cinema offered a theater-type experience that the viewer was meant to experience from start to finish. But by the late 1960s, avant-garde movies began to proliferate in art galleries as part of art installations. Throughout the 1970s, these installations increasingly embraced the video artworks of non-theatrical artists such as Nam June Paik, Bruce Nauman, William Wegman, Bill Viola, and many others, a transition away from film technology that was more gradual within the theatrical avant-garde. Though they share common roots, these cinematic high arts have diverged since then, with video artists now often unaware of their historical links to the filmmakers of the New American Cinema.<sup>284</sup> Though high-profile crossover

artists, including Snow, Lynch, Greenaway, Akerman, Matthew Barney, Chris Marker, Isaac Julien, Apichatpong Weerasethakul, and Miranda July, have over the past decades straddled these divides, many moving-image artists now choose to focus on a single area. Another change that has been noted by scholars is the institutionalization of the field after 1970, the year the Anthology Film Archives was founded.

The institutionalization of experimental cinema has impacted every segment of the field. Video artists have, for example, found opportunities for funding and exhibition through art schools, museums, galleries, and private foundations. But what intrigues me most is the institutionalization of important theatrical segments of American experimental cinema. Since the 1960s, artists in this area have found jobs in film schools, film-studies departments, media arts centers, and museums and have distributed their works through coops like New York's Film-Makers' Cooperative and San Francisco's Canyon Cinema. They have also exhibited films at festivals like Ann Arbor and MadCat; in microcinemas, including David Sherman and Rebecca Barten's Total Mobile Home Microcinema in San Francisco and Andrea Grover's Aurora Picture Show in Houston; and through museum theaters, repertory theaters, college classrooms, university theaters, and a multitude of makeshift, DIY spaces.<sup>285</sup> This process of institutionalization, *ad hoc* though it often is, has led James to highlight divisions in experimental cinema between "the student film and the faculty film."<sup>286</sup> But much more telling divisions exist, I believe, between student artists and faculty artists or, better yet, between both classes of academic and what Ramey has called the "homegrown" experimentalist.<sup>287</sup> These divisions, along with the many institutional conflicts they have fomented, have developed in part through the historical avant-garde's anti-institutional traditions, which have been extensively detailed

by theorists like Bourdieu and Peter Bürger.<sup>288</sup> Such divisions are problems not only for filmmakers but for academics, too, which is to say they have over the past few decades become issues within academic disciplines like film studies.

By the time that Wollen published his article in 1975, many of these institutional factors were also influencing the European avant-garde cinemas, particularly those that were organized by coops. But though Wollen refers to some of these factors in passing, as when he mentions the “hornet’s nest” of video,<sup>289</sup> his primary focus is on political and aesthetic questions. To understand the strengths and weaknesses of such an approach, we should turn now to his classic essay, “The Two Avant-Gardes.”

### Wollen’s Mixed Fruit

One of the most obvious strengths of Wollen’s article is its simplified schema, which splits the European scene into two understandable tribes. It is to his credit that Wollen never pretends that all experimentalists fit neatly into these groups. Indeed, if his methods have any value, it comes from the comparative way that he deploys them to follow these avant-gardes through time and space, charting them as cultural positions. As a result, Wollen shows his readers not only what has divided these two avant-gardes but what has united them. For instance, in the avant-garde perspective that Wollen clearly shares, the commercial Hollywood film is equivalent to the commercial art film of the “Antonioni or Fellini or Truffaut” variety, which aspires to the “narrative fiction 35mm film-making” that is Hollywood’s specialty.<sup>290</sup> Hence, Wollen traces the developments of the cinematic avant-garde primarily through the developments of the painters, poets, and musicians who had previously pushed for anti-commercial innovations, both political and aesthetic, within the confines of the art world. And Wollen notes the conflicts that always

arose from the political bearing of the avant-garde, whose art-world context also included its spiritual opposite within modernism, art for art's sake.<sup>291</sup>

To me, the strongest aspect of Wollen's article is the way that it depicts European avant-gardists as specific cultural agents who are inevitably stuck between one position and another. For instance, the militant, Godard-type avant-gardist—who, in Wollen's view, emerged through the example of Sergei Eisenstein—tends to differentiate himself or herself from the coop avant-gardist by presenting the latter as a “mere” formalist, which is to say, as an artist whose interest in stylistic experiment resembles that of the aesthete artist, who would never deign to inspire the masses. But the Godard-type artist must also guard against “vulgar” Marxists (who depict *all* formal innovation as “mere” formalism) by claiming the Maoist justification of “scientific experiment.”<sup>292</sup> For such an auteur, revolutionary form must not be merely political at the level of theme and story; it must also represent a radical “break with bourgeois norms of diegesis.”<sup>293</sup> But, as Wollen rightly notes, the problem with this Brechtian position is that “unless it is thought through carefully or stopped arbitrarily at some safe point, [it] leads inevitably straight into the positions of the other avant-garde.” For coop avant-gardists *also* consider themselves political. The difference is that they place a greater stress on formal experiment than auteurs of the Godard-type, so they must reconcile themselves to the “minority status”—and the public alienation—yielded by such innovation.

But Wollen's essay leaves its reader with questions and contradictions. The author notes in closing that, if he went further, he would discuss “the institutional and economic framework in which filmmakers find themselves.”<sup>294</sup> Indeed, had he delved these topics, Wollen might have discussed the price that auteurs like Godard had to pay to take part “in

the commercial system,” with its stars and budgets—and its isolation from art collectives and their sense of community.<sup>295</sup> The coop system’s “artisanal production” could yield formalism, but its egalitarian collaboration could yield solidarity, too; if these filmmakers lost touch with the masses, they had grassroots communities to fall back on. Viewed from this perspective, it is difficult to believe that a cinema made in the hierarchical auteur system of the commercial art cinema could ever be revolutionary.<sup>296</sup> Wouldn’t this cinema have to “dilute” its themes and its forms to make itself accessible to broader audiences, trading revolutionary effects for populist appeal, in the manner of Steven Soderbergh’s *Che* (2008) or Olivier Assayas’s *Carlos* (2010)? Or is it the other way around—would this cinema have to do those things in order to have revolutionary populist effects, meaning Godard was occupying the right cultural position but making the wrong bets in ratcheting up his experimentation in mid-career works like *Le gai savoir* (1968)? On the other hand, could a grassroots community that disavowed popular distribution ever hope to be truly revolutionary? Granted, it would have the freedom to take many risks or none at all. But could it reach, let alone inspire, the masses if distributed non-commercially? Quandaries like these cannot be resolved. But if Wollen had posed them in this manner—rather than spending time on the formal and political minutiae—he might have been able to frame his avant-gardes more clearly as adjacent fields.

This thought leads to my major concern. Assuming that they occupy the same systems of production and distribution,<sup>297</sup> could the Godardian auteur *really* be objectively distinguished from the ostensibly less experimental Antonioni-type? Wollen suggests that this distinction is clear-cut, but I think this idea of the avant-garde comes

down to notions of value (political or aesthetic) and authenticity. By contrast, Wollen frames the coop avant-gardes by way of distribution alone. This means coop avant-gardists did not have to qualify as avant-garde through evaluative, political, or art-historical means. Rather, they submitted a film to a coop and followed its policies, which were egalitarian and inclusive. (They could also qualify as avant-garde in this sense, I believe, even if they did not use the coops—so long as they used the other networks of distribution and exhibition also favored by coop filmmakers, especially the grassroots spaces, media arts centers, and universities of urban centers like New York, Chicago, San Francisco, Houston, Los Angeles, and Seattle.) The disparities between these approaches should be clear. For one thing, the institutional method legitimates more avant-gardists. Whereas Wollen can offer only a few examples of the Godard-type, he notes that in 1975 the coop field already included many practitioners in Britain alone. Because the Godardian auteur occupies an avant-garde *extreme* of the art-film field, the critic must decide which art-film auteurs don't make the cut, basing that decision on form and politics—a practice that leads to a subjective method that is evaluative, regardless of its justifications. Hence, from Wollen's perspective, not many art-film auteurs deserve the avant-garde label; he even excludes Antonioni, who arguably had the right kind of credentials. Today, after the cinema has encountered many similar experimental auteurs—including Godard, Straub-Huillet, Marker, Sontag, Cassavetes, Greenaway, Lynch, Alain Resnais, Joyce Wieland, Andrei Tarkovsky, Chantal Akerman, Derek Jarman, Béla Tarr, Apichatpong Weerasethakul, and Wollen himself (along with his co-director, Laura Mulvey), to cite only a few—it is still difficult to know which experimentalists “deserve” the label. Must these artists have shared Godard's Brechtian methods and Mao-inflected

consciousness? Must they, in other words, have made intellectual think pieces that scorned the social realisms of their time and the bourgeois values that those techniques appeared to uphold? Or must they simply have made *exceptionally* experimental art films in any number of art-historical categories—films like Resnais’s *L’année dernière à Marienbad* (1961), Tarkovsky’s *The Mirror* (1975), Jarman’s *Caravaggio* (1986), Tarr’s *Sátántangó* (1994), Greenaway’s *8 ½ Women* (1999), or even Lynch’s *Inland Empire* (2006)?

Wollen complains in his article about the scant attention given this second avant-garde relative to all the notice paid the coop avant-garde. But I think this disparity just reflects the fact that his second avant-garde was a subjective tradition, a political and art-historical tradition, not an institutional reality like the coop avant-garde. His comparison of those fields seems to have been a critical intervention that lent his chosen style of filmmaking traction as he prepared to make that kind of experimental film along with Mulvey. But even though the Brechtian products of their collaboration, including *Riddles of the Sphinx* (1977), have left their mark on experimental communities,<sup>298</sup> their status in those fields does not mean that this school of experimental filmmaking can be held up as truly comparable to mature institution slike coop cinema. In the end, Wollen’s two avant-gardes seem even less comparable than apples and oranges.

### Reconceptualizing American Avant-Garde Cinema

Though we should probably dispense with Wollen’s mixed approach to the avant-garde, we should not necessarily dispense with his idea of seeing this cinema through its divisions. Indeed, such divisions have existed in the American coop cinemas since the 1960s. How might we go about theorizing these internal splits? First, it is a good idea to

identify the best scholars available. And we should remember what we have learned from Wollen: that it helps to divide the avant-garde into comparable areas. And finally, it helps to draw on cultural theorists like Bourdieu, who combines an understanding of art history with a broad knowledge of sociology and ethnography.

When it comes to describing the field's institutional splits, the scholars I think of most readily are Ramey and Zryd. In "Between Art, Industry and Academia: The Fragile Balancing Act of the Avant-Garde Film Community," Ramey approaches coop cinema along an ethnographic path. Like Wollen, Ramey is an avant-garde filmmaker; however, this vocation makes her no less detached as a scholar. Instead, she manipulates her insider status to academic benefit, using other "[a]vant-garde filmmakers" as her "informants," as supplemented by interviews with curators, technicians, and professors.<sup>299</sup> She begins by describing the intentions of individual participants in this field ("to critique, subvert and provide an alternative to dominant, mainstream media production"), by tracing its history as a field, and by analyzing how its idea of "the avant-garde artisan" has been produced and reproduced.<sup>300</sup> Ramey then outlines the institutional structure of this experimental cinema by positioning individual participants within, between, and across subcultures and industries. She neither analyzes any avant-garde films nor evaluates them; instead, she observes how avant-garde subgroups make value claims based on forms, politics, and subcultural positions. Through terms like these, Ramey differentiates the "homegrown" experimentalist from the "university-made" artisan.<sup>301</sup> Throughout her essay, she shows avant-gardists struggling "with institutionalization and legitimization by the dominant film, art and university industries."<sup>302</sup> Ramey concludes her piece by

arguing that avant-garde “communities are supported by the art, film and university industries but are also threatened by their efforts to standardize and legitimate them.”<sup>303</sup>

Zryd’s essay “The Academy and the Avant-Garde: A Relationship of Dependence and Resistance” focuses on one part of Ramey’s institutional triad, i.e., the academy. But as its title indicates, the article’s premise is similar to Ramey’s conclusion: the American avant-garde has long been conflicted, often resisting its own supporting institutions. What distinguishes Zryd is his use of historical methods to trace and contextualize the avant-garde’s flimsy anti-institutional rhetoric—all as a prelude to collapsing that rhetoric by presenting contrary evidence in sections like “There Have Always Been Avant-Garde Institutions” and “The Academy Was There in the 1960s Too.”<sup>304</sup> Zryd is making an economic argument that updates Ramey’s account of a conflicted field.<sup>305</sup> He wants to argue that the avant-garde’s conflicted state has, *at the level of the field*, been a virtual smoke screen that has never interfered with its growth, which has been steady, sustained by a university system with which it shares interests, like the commitment to freedom of expression. The avant-garde’s dependency has, then, culminated in a field of production more stable than its individual poor-mouthing suggests.<sup>306</sup>

These arguments can be framed usefully if we look at the way in which Bourdieu talks about the avant-garde in *The Rules of Art* (1996). Though Bourdieu wrote this book mainly in reference to developments in nineteenth-century French literature, he intended it to have larger application and even implies its relevance to “‘experimental’ cinema” in one passage.<sup>307</sup> As in his other books, Bourdieu construes the avant-garde as occupying the pure-art sector of the field of cultural production, meaning the avant-garde is defined by its small-scale production and its low economic capital, the compensation for which is

its relatively rich cultural and symbolic capital. Bourdieu also defines the avant-garde as a field of art that is stridently opposed to the “banalization” of art despite the fact that its own processes seem to accelerate that outcome.<sup>308</sup> As producers, avant-gardists judge each other through their ability to impart an authentic sense of “rupture” in “the best informed consumers,” namely themselves, their competitors, and critics who are savvy to what has been accomplished through the history of their field. Ergo, in this milieu, artists struggle to resist “the social signs of consecration—decoration, prizes, academies and all kinds of honours”—because these signs of institutional status seem to indicate that their works of art have aged, socially speaking, “through diffusion . . . in the process of canonization among a more and more extended clientele,” with the result that those works of art can at most create a sense of rupture only in “simple lay people.”<sup>309</sup>

If we put Ramey and Zryd together with Bourdieu, we can create a conceptual model that makes sense of the American avant-garde as an anti-institutional institution. Historically, coop cinema has had a marginal presence in cultural institutions like the art world and the academy. Though this marginalization has been an economic burden, it is in accord with the larger history of the avant-garde, which has been defined in terms of a purist rhetoric that has had anti-commercial, anti-institutional, and egalitarian inflections. Marginalization has thus been crucial to the identity and symbolic capital of this field—in part because, as Bourdieu has indicated, broader recognition signifies banalization in the avant-garde. At first, the movement lived up to this sense of dispossession, for its early practitioners, including Brakhage, Deren, and Gregory Markopoulos, were impoverished, homegrown filmmakers without much formal training.<sup>310</sup> But as this avant-garde gained more adherents and ironic visibility as an “underground,” it became far more organized.

Its key innovation was a coop system that distributed works without violating its own purist values—though, predictably, its “purest” adherents rebelled even against this self-consciously scruffy, egalitarian, grassroots institution. In the end, the cooperatives helped circulate art movies and also served as a kind of anchor that encouraged the formation of new communities that flaunted their DIY sensibilities. Though their use has changed over the years—according to Ramey, coops are now “agents of history” that serve mainly as archives for older filmmakers, with younger filmmakers opting to self-distribute works on DVD—coops still have a stabilizing centrality in this sector, holding it together by preserving its history.<sup>311</sup> After all, the field’s history must be knowable if new generations of artist are to “surpass” that history in Bourdieu’s sense.<sup>312</sup>

But even before the first successes of this purist movement, major institutions like the academy and the art world had shown an interest in it, serving as intermediaries that lent it publicity and that helped legitimate some of its practitioners. These ties to cultural institutions were controversial within this cinema, for they seemed to betray its grassroots ethos—and again, institutional status might indicate the banalization of a filmmaker’s art. Nevertheless, because its practitioners had needs like anyone else—and because it is even more difficult to make movies without institutional resources than it is to make poems or paintings without them—more and more of those practitioners began to secure funding through these institutions, with the academy the most reliable option in this regard (just as it was, in the 1960s, already the leading consumer of coop rentals<sup>313</sup>). As time passed, increasing numbers of these artists secured not only their publicity, funding, equipment, and employment through the university but also their training—for more and more film schools and art schools offered courses in experimental film production and scholarship.

Consequently, as the movement reached its maturity, it contained (1) non-institutional, homegrown experimentalists largely unaffiliated with the legitimate cultural institutions like the academy or the art world; (2) partly institutional, homegrown experimentalists, some of whose funding or training came through these legitimate cultural institutions; and (3) “university-made” experimentalists, most of whose funding *and* training came from these institutions. These distinctions were, of course, loose and pointedly relative, with mobility visible across all of these sectors. Furthermore, it is worth wondering how closely the homegrown filmmakers of the later periods truly resembled the earlier avant-gardists, since unlike their antecedents, the later artists had the benefit of looking back on more established traditions and benefited in many indirect ways from resources circulated by the academy and the art world, even if they were never personally part of either. That said, even if these divisions are, as constructions, too brittle to contain the full complexity and fluidity of this field, they are nevertheless divisions that have profoundly shaped the thinking and activity of experimentalists within the field.

Indeed, the perception of these divisions has activated a dynamic that is prevalent in many indie cinemas but that is particularly striking in coop cinemas. At the subcultural level, the coop avant-garde reserves much of its sanction for the least institutionalized artists and scenes, no matter how much cultural authority an individual or an institution seems to wield in the field. Thus, in Bourdieu’s terms, we might say that “authenticity” or “integrity” is in the avant-garde a symbolic form of subcultural capital that increases as a participant’s economic and cultural capital decreases; trading it for distribution or for institutional funding can, then, leave its artists open to authenticity-based critiques (or to charges of political or aesthetic conservatism) in their original art-making subcultures.<sup>314</sup>

The least institutionalized, most homegrown experimentalists seem to contrive this purely symbolic form of subcultural capital from thin air as a perverse form of compensation for their nonexistent economic capital and their equally nonexistent cultural capital. Thus, in the avant-garde, to have one's subcultural status recognized is to jeopardize it, especially if that recognition is articulated in a more mainstream field. This indie dynamic makes avant-garde cinema open and inclusive, lending force to the egalitarian rhetorics wielded by its practitioners. Yet the anti-canonical ideology that results from these processes may also be linked to the purist snobbery that Bourdieu notes in *The Rules of Art*, which is a form of condescension that assumes that any experimental work consecrated at the cultural level is passé, déclassé, and no longer capable of inspiring an authentic sense of "rupture" in the best-informed consumers.<sup>315</sup> In this indie dynamic, the avant-garde seems both open and closed, at once purely populist and purely classist.

Thus we have two fluidly interconnected avant-gardes, one of which is fairly non-institutional and one of which is relatively institutional, as supplemented by a fully hybrid third category whose members may identify with either of the two other poles, depending on their needs and circumstances. These two fully relative sectors have the same sort of reality, given that they are both defined by the heterogeneous movie forms that circulate through alternative distribution schemes. Clearly, these avant-gardes cannot be defined through given styles or given themes. The coop ethos that has united them has been too inclusive to sustain any form-based notion of authenticity, and the wider ethos of novelty-for-novelty's sake has also made such notions patently unworkable. In theory, *everything* is permitted there, from narrative, animation, and politically motivated documentary to the widest range of abstraction. This is why, as Kleinhans notes, the art-historical model

first circulated by P. Adams Sitney in *Visionary Film* (1974) was at once an intervention that helped establish American avant-garde cinema as a “serious” art *and* an intervention that could never offer the final word on coop cinema.<sup>316</sup>

### Making Virtues of Necessity

At this point, I want to backtrack to provide some of the historical details left out of the cultural model provided above. Once we have established those details, we will be better situated to understand the problems that are associated with this model (problems that I discuss in the second half of this section). The first major detail is the fact that the economic rhetoric of the avant-garde was codified in the New American Cinema’s most crucial documents, which tended to corroborate its sense of dispossession. For example, in his letters, Brakhage often made aesthetic virtues of the economic necessities thrust on his filmmaking by his chronically impoverished state; thus, he framed poverty as a path to pure cinema. Brakhage was so adept at this mythmaking that he even transformed the theft of his 16mm camera, which he could not afford to replace, into myth by depicting it as the necessary break to get back to basics, that is, to 8mm filmmaking.<sup>317</sup> Later, when Brakhage explained his use of hand-scratched title- and credit-sequences, he linked the inexpensiveness of this technique to the modernist goal of prodding the audience into an encounter with the sensuous surface of the medium.<sup>318</sup> Using similar cues, Sitney’s book *Visionary Film* (which, as I have noted, helped consecrate the leading filmmakers of the New American Cinema at the cultural level) presented Brakhage as the American avant-garde’s most crucial innovator.<sup>319</sup> It turned the pathos of this maverick artist, whose avant-garde tactics were often just clever responses to economic austerities, into myths

that seem to verify the aesthetic value of Brakhage's improvisations.<sup>320</sup> Sitney then proceeded to assign these myths to other filmmakers, other cinemas.

This romanticization of economic constraint was also apparent in the founding documents of the most important avant-garde institutions. "The First Statement By the New American Cinema Group" (1962), the manifesto of the New York Film-makers' Coop (FMC), asserts that "[t]he low budget is not a purely commercial consideration. It goes with our ethical and esthetic beliefs, directly connected with the things we want to say, and the way we want to say them."<sup>321</sup> For experimentalists like Mekas, having a low budget was not simply the economic consequence of working in a milieu devoted to free experiment; it was also a virtue that conferred pure autonomy, which had moral-aesthetic value. This anti-commercial rhetoric did not change much as avant-garde cinema became more institutionalized. It had a regular presence in Mekas's journal *Film Culture*, which championed avant-garde films from 1954 on, as well as in the regular columns that he began writing for *The Village Voice* in 1958. And this rhetoric was just as often recycled to justify other institutions, such as the Millennium Film Workshop (and its journal) or the Anthology Film Archives (and its essential cinema list). Today, second-generation avant-gardists have continued this strategic rhetoric, making more virtues of necessity. Consider how Craig Baldwin (of *Tribulation 99* [1991] and *Sonic Outlaws* [1995] fame) has endorsed Bruce Conner's "cinema povera" tradition.

But the anti-institutional embrace of avant-garde institutions created problems from the start. American experimentalists like Baldwin have elevated themselves through their political hostility to what James calls "the commodity culture of bourgeois society," and this avant-garde posture has "axiomatically" entailed hostility to the mainstream.<sup>322</sup>

Yet, as James points out, “the relations between avant-garde film and its own institutions have hardly been more amicable or stable” than the relations between avant-garde film and mainstream institutions.<sup>323</sup> Thus, even grass-roots institutions like the New York FMC have been susceptible to anti-institutional attacks from artists who have disagreed with their centralization of policy and power. Mekas knew that the best way to outflank critics of the FMC was to adopt an egalitarian policy as well as a professional style that seemed disorganized or “non-institutional.”<sup>324</sup> But the FMC had so much subcultural success that it could not avoid all criticism. Indeed, many recognized figures, including luminaries like Brakhage and Jack Smith, railed against the cooperative system, regardless of its anti-institutional stylings. According to Arthur, Brakhage and Smith deemed the FMC a “parody” of Hollywood industrial filmmaking, with Smith characterizing the coop as too rigid, too commercialized, and insufficiently anarchic.<sup>325</sup>

As suggested above, part of what made the FMC a success despite such criticism was its egalitarian policy. Perhaps the signal event in the development of this policy was the moment in 1962 when Mekas decided not to work with Cinema 16, the New York film society that exhibited and distributed alternative movies from 1947 to 1963.<sup>326</sup> Mekas disliked this non-profit because its programming scheme in effect made its founder, Amos Vogel, “the sole arbiter of which avant-garde films were available and the primary arbiter of how they were presented.”<sup>327</sup> Not only did the FMC cooperative model opt against selection criteria, distributing any film that followed its policies, it returned a higher percentage of fees to artists, thus ensuring its competitiveness. Within a few years, Vogel had transitioned in other directions, becoming affiliated with the New York Film Festival and selling his Cinema 16 catalogue to Barney Rosset at Grove Press; and soon

thereafter, other distributors such as San Francisco's Canyon Cinema and Toronto's Canadian Filmmakers Distribution Center had adopted the coop paradigm, whose policy of inclusiveness remained standard across the board. This egalitarianism still makes it possible for the most anti-institutional experimentalists to accept the coop as "authentic." Thus, even homegrown avant-gardists like Seattle filmmaker Jon Behrens, whose work is distributed by Canyon, make distinctions between coop institutions and more centralized forums like museums, which receive "city or state money."<sup>328</sup>

Indeed, in a useful article, Todd Bayma has argued that the coops, in tandem with "the small size of audiences, lack of wider recognition, and low financial return," have served "to discourage individuals and organizations from setting themselves up as evaluative gatekeepers."<sup>329</sup> This has in turn encouraged the insider view that Bayma quotes, namely, that this avant-garde area is very open and deserves its indie reputation, for it is "nothing like art, where you have a big, establishment art structure . . . In film, anyone can blast their way into the area if they try hard enough, to some extent."<sup>330</sup> Fed over time by the availability of quality video equipment, this inclusivist, communitarian spirit has given hope to students and graduates of film schools as well as to homegrown artists like Behrens without formal training to speak of.<sup>331</sup>

But in the end, this egalitarian spirit could not dispel the avant-garde's most basic quandaries and shortcomings. Because the avant-garde's egalitarian logic, codified by its coop policies, seems to endorse an anti-hierarchical position, it is in a continual state of revolt against institutions that would use any hierarchical canons—even the smallest, most rudimentary ones—as the basis for its programming choices.<sup>332</sup> Indeed, as Ramey has noted, the selection of first-generation avant-gardists like Shirley Clarke and Ernie

Gehr as canonized faculty members “did not bring harmony to the avant-garde film community. Younger filmmakers became critical of their elders, accusing them of empire building, censorship and stagnation.”<sup>333</sup> Thus, Zryd has documented that in 1981 San Francisco Art Institute film students protested a screening of works by newly “official” artists like Gehr, Paul Sharits, and George Landow at the San Francisco Cinematheque, charging the Cinematheque with ““deliberate and systematic lack of responsibility in representing the current work of local filmmakers in [its] programming.””<sup>334</sup> The problem for the avant-garde establishment was clear. The air of permanent, collective revolt that animates the avant-garde—which is enshrined by its coop policies, and which is a major factor in its continuing appeal to student filmmakers and to homegrown artisans—was part of the coop ethos sanctioned by that establishment. This ethos was in turn related to the broader avant-garde ethos that Bourdieu discusses, the one that considers banalization a natural outcome of canonization insofar as canonization entailed the distribution of a work, a style, or a thought along more mainstream pathways.<sup>335</sup> American avant-garde cinema was caught in a sticky albeit predictable authenticity problematic: as its members tried to benefit from their increasing consecration, its least institutionalized members could criticize them as “sell outs” untrue to core values.<sup>336</sup>

What we cannot escape in all this is the fact that the avant-garde has championed the most abstract, difficult forms. Many of these forms fall outside normative capacities for human enjoyment,<sup>337</sup> meaning their appreciation can require a great deal of education or even “re-education.” Ergo, even the avant-garde’s most secure institutions have faced scarce funds that have created limited opportunities for exhibition. (Coop policies may be commendable in their egalitarianism, but they offer no guarantee that anyone will screen

the movies.) That the avant-garde has found it difficult to accept the realities of scarcity is indicated by the fact that small-press journals like *Spiral* have continued to ask naïve questions like the one cited by Zryd: ““Is the anointing of certain films and filmmakers over others inevitable when the exhibition of film art becomes institutionalized?””<sup>338</sup> The answer to this question should go beyond just “yes.” It should also include the fact that institutions cannot be blamed for practical realities. Programmers in these institutions *must* anoint one filmmaker over another; unlike the coops, they haven’t the luxury of taking everyone. Indeed, programmers have had to choose among so many artists for such a limited number of screening opportunities that they have quite naturally tied their programming choices to their own institutional priorities.

Consider the situation of the microcinemas. The microcinema movement began in 1993 through Sherman and Barten’s Total Mobile Home Microcinema and grew over the next two decades through start-ups that were typically part of the founder’s home, like Grover’s Aurora Picture Show. By 2000, there were by some estimates over a hundred of these exhibition sites.<sup>339</sup> Self-described descendants of the early-twentieth-century film clubs and the grassroots viewing spaces of the New American Cinema, microcinemas have hosted traditional avant-garde films as well as the more interactive, multimedia experiences associated with expanded cinema. (There is also room in the microcinema world for the eclecticism of the cult nexus; see, for instance, Baldwin’s Other Cinema in San Francisco.<sup>340</sup>) Though the microcinemas have maintained their anti-institutional bearing over the years,<sup>341</sup> they have attracted institutional funding and have encouraged fierce competition for the few but fairly prestigious theatrical screenings (as opposed to less prestigious classroom screenings), stimulating grassroots hierarchies among local

artists. But microcinemas have had no option but to balance conflicting interests when selecting which artists and which works they will program. Though they range from refined affairs to strategically ad hoc ones, they are all devoted to the artists, for whom some microcinemas have even arranged funding.<sup>342</sup> But today microcinemas are often dependent for this kind of funding on private granting agencies such as the Warhol Foundation or on government granting agencies like the National Endowment for the Arts. As Grover has indicated, these different kinds of sponsors have different kinds of requirements that must be met as a condition of sponsorship. By no means autonomous, the microcinemas walk a fine line in their programming.<sup>343</sup>

A very different set of dilemmas is created when avant-gardists bring their anti-institutional sensibility to the academy, hoping to benefit from academic largesse without sacrificing subcultural authenticity in the bargain. We shouldn't look on this issue as a one-sided moral affair, of course, for the academy has sought to exploit experimental artists, too. Especially when film-studies was coalescing in the 1960s and 1970s, film departments hired experimental filmmakers because they brought the prestige and allure of a popular new sector of film culture. According to Zryd, hiring them "made fiscal sense as they commanded lower salaries and could usually bridge university cultures in the humanities and fine arts . . ."<sup>344</sup> These trends have led to difficult professional lives. "Many avant-garde filmmakers are forced throughout their careers," Ramey has noted, "to piece together a living on adjunct teaching salaries."<sup>345</sup> Still, we should see that the exploitation is mutual and, on the avant-gardist's side, strategic. The adjunct life allows artists to access some of the legitimacy, money, equipment, and opportunity offered by the academy while still holding this institution at arm's length, allowing them to avoid

the appearance of cooptation in their art-making subcultures—and allowing them to avoid the restrictions on creativity enacted by tenure pressures. Clearly, what is most important in this field is maintaining direct control over one’s art without any threat of institutional compromise or banalization. Though the size of adjunct pay constrains the art of those who live on it, the fact that those adjuncts keep making avant-garde art seems to confirm the authenticity of their vision, however constrained it is at the practical level. Indeed, filmmakers across experimental cinema who support themselves in similar ways, whether through construction jobs, by waiting tables, etc., in effect preserve their ability to “make virtues of necessity” when promoting their art.

But inside the academy itself, the down side of this strategic posture is that avant-gardists are in effect prevented from honing their skills as scholars. From an academic point of view, this is very disappointing, for it stands to reason that avant-gardists-*cum*-scholars would find themselves in perfect position to explain the avant-garde critically, historically, and theoretically. But the avant-garde’s anti-institutional ethos is just one cause of this problem; another is the way that the academy often rewards avant-gardists as artists first and scholars second (if at all). Thus, as Ramey has informed me, avant-gardists in fine-art tenure-track positions often chase the most conservative forms of artistic recognition in order to satisfy their promotion committees, which in effect hinders their credibility as artists within more authentic, i.e., less institutionalized, art-making subcultures even as it stunts them as scholars.<sup>346</sup> At times, avant-gardists-*cum*-scholars have made decisive contributions despite the many obstacles in their path. This has been true in the case of Ramey and that of Arthur, who was a critic and participant in the

American avant-garde for over three decades. Regrettably, though, the accomplishments of these insider figures seem to be exceptions to the rule.

One of the areas in which “insider scholarship” can be most valuable is in figuring out which “neglected figures” warrant study. In avant-garde scholarship, the problem of the neglected figure is particularly daunting, for it is complicated by the fact that even well loved artists are neglected by mainstream standards. This problem is now improving under the influence of YouTube, streaming rentals, and various online archives,<sup>347</sup> but the fact remains that only the smallest portion of the American experimental tradition is available for mainstream consumption outside the coops. When this fact is combined with the multiculturalism of the humanities, which encourages the study of individuals from historically neglected traditions, the justification problem becomes knottier. Not only are avant-gardists understudied as a group, due in part to their own anti-institutional intransigence and the realities of human scarcity, but a large number of them have also been subject to the same exclusionary dynamics that have suppressed the role of women and minorities throughout the history of American cinema.

Recent studies have begun to focus squarely on the experimental cinemas made by female and black artists as well as on those who identify themselves as queer artists. To cite two but examples, Robin Blaetz has compiled a volume of essays called *Women’s Experimental Cinema* (2007), which supplements an earlier volume called *Women and Experimental Filmmaking* (2005), which was edited by Jean Petrolle and Virginia Wright Wexman. Furthermore, both Arthur’s *A Line of Sight* and James’s book *The Most Typical Avant-Garde: History and Geography of Minor Cinemas in Los Angeles* (2005), among other studies, contain sections on black experimental cinema.<sup>348</sup> These studies provide

rationales for studying female experimentalists such as Clarke, Wieland, and Barbara Hammer and black experimentalists such as Marlon Riggs, Cheryle Dunye, and Haile Gerima. But these studies do not always clearly elucidate the central problem of studying neglected minorities within avant-garde cinema: *to what extent is their neglect due to institutional factors that work against people in historically disempowered groups, and to what extent is it due to the anti-institutional ethos of their field?* It stands to reason that the scholars best equipped to tease apart these factors are those with insider knowledge. But because avant-gardists with dual roles in the academy have had incentives to avoid assimilating academic values and to avoid doing scholarship at all, they've rarely framed these questions in this way, let alone answered them credibly.

Nevertheless, some of the best analysts in this insider category, including Ramey and Arthur, have managed to isolate these questions so as to tackle them head on. For example, after noting that the "avant-garde canon has frequently been chided by feminists and postmodernists as constituting a fringe bastion of conservative, idealist discourse," Arthur contends that, by respecting its own "identitarian impulses," the coop avant-garde has evolved into a multicultural area with greater appeal to black experimentalists.<sup>349</sup> By approaching the topic rigorously, Arthur helps his readers discern why black cinema was considered separate from avant-garde cinema, how these cinemas have merged in the interim, and why black experimentalists like Riggs, Greaves, and Cheryl Dunye deserve more recognition in the context of the avant-garde tradition.

All of which is to recognize that academic attention is finite. If it is unreasonable to expect exhibitors to dole out screenings to avant-gardists in egalitarian ways, it is also unreasonable to expect academics to study *all* of them, or *all* of their minority figures,

just because their field has long been neglected. Nor is it reasonable to expect academics to pay attention to particular experimentalists on the basis of their politics or aesthetics alone. Like the avant-garde, the academy is a competitive field with its own standards of truth and value. Generally, analytic claims that are authoritatively contextualized, laying out how specific experiments and specific experimentalists have managed to embody avant-garde notions of value in culturally significant ways at subculturally significant stages of the avant-garde tradition, have the greatest chance of acceptance. In my view, insiders who can internalize academic values and apply them to their insider knowledge of the coop movement have the best chance of creating authoritative academic rationales for privileging certain avant-garde figures over others.

Of all American art cinemas, the coop avant-garde has had the least commercial distribution. As a consequence, this purist sector has a firmer claim on the avant-garde label than other experimental art cinemas because it occupies the marginal cultural position historically designated as “avant-garde”—and, within this oddly stable cultural position, the coop avant-garde has generated its own institutions and cultivated its own peculiar ties to prestigious cultural institutions, like the art world and the academy. For me, it is imperative that we focus on this tradition when analyzing the avant-garde as a cinematic movement because other kinds of experimental tradition, like the Godardian tradition discussed by Wollen, lack an objective institutional reality. This is significant, for the coop avant-garde’s institutional reality is what makes it possible to understand the values that underlie the field’s prodigious creativity and heterogeneous forms—which, in turn, makes it possible to understand this avant-garde’s peculiar internal divisions and its idiosyncratic external relationships. Of course, there are many reasons for pursuing these

understandings. But as scholars, we should take special note, I think, of what they tell us about the history and present constitution of film studies.

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<sup>262</sup>NOTES TO CHAPTER EIGHT

<sup>262</sup> Peter Wollen, "The Two Avant-Gardes," *Studio International* vol. 190, no. 978 (November/December 1975), pp. 171–175.

<sup>263</sup> For a description of one set of hipster scenes, see David James, "L.A.'s Hipster Cinema," *Film Quarterly* 63.1 (Fall 2009), pp. 56–67. The term "university made" is Kathryn Ramey's. See Kathryn Ramey, "Between Art, Industry and Academia: The Fragile Balancing Act of the Avant-Garde Film Community," *Visual Anthropology Review* 18.1–2 (2002), p. 26.

<sup>264</sup> To understand the progressions glossed here, see Morris Weitz, "The Role of Theory in Aesthetics" (1956), in Morris Weitz (ed.), *Problems in Aesthetics* (1959; New York: Macmillan, 1963), pp. 145–156; George Dickie, *The Art Circle* (1984; Evanston: Chicago Spectrum Press, 1997); Noël Carroll, *Philosophy of Art: A Contemporary Introduction* (London: Routledge, 1999); Rick Altman, *Film/Genre* (London: British Film Institute, 1999); Pierre Bourdieu, *Distinction: A Social Critique of the Judgement of Taste* (1979), trans. Richard Nice (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1984); and Howard Becker, *Art Worlds* (1982; Berkeley: University of California Press, 2008).

<sup>265</sup> As I argue throughout this book, there is a long tradition of referring to the prewar avant-gardes as "art films" and as "art cinema." (See note 11.) But the postwar avant-gardes have typically been separated from

art cinema by film historians, often due to the manifest formal, political, and subcultural distinctions that became clearer once the coop avant-gardes (like the New American Cinema) and the various new waves bearing art films from Europe and Asia came to dominate these divergent postwar scenes. But insofar as these areas *used* to be folded together—and have remained connected by ideals of anti-commercialism, authorship, and so on—it is logical to use Noël Carroll's historical/narrative method of art identification in order to re-connect these sectors so as to see them as two areas marked by a larger art-cinema impulse, just in distinctive ways. After all, if we can re-imagine mainstream or cult cinemas as forms of art cinema, we will not find it difficult to re-imagine avant-garde cinema as art cinema.

266

<sup>266</sup> See, for example, Paul Arthur, *A Line of Sight: American Avant-Garde Film Since 1965* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2005), pp. xv, 153.

<sup>267</sup> Wollen, "The Two Avant-Gardes," p. 171.

<sup>268</sup> Jeffrey Skoller, *Shadows, Specters, Shards: Making History in Avant-Garde Film* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2005), p. 93.

<sup>269</sup> As András Bálint Kovács puts it, "[a]vant-garde/experimental/underground cinema is a specific cinematic practice that may or may not include a political component. It differs from classical cinema as well as from modernist art cinema precisely by virtue of the difference of its practice. Virtually all verbal proclamations of avant-garde filmmakers show a lesser or greater amount of hostility toward commercial filmmaking. It opposes not just the Hollywood-type film industry but the European art-film industry as well." András Bálint Kovács, *Screening Modernism: European Art Cinema, 1950-1980* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2007), p. 32.

<sup>270</sup> See Robin Blaetz, "Introduction: Women's Experimental Cinema: Critical Frameworks," *Women's Experimental Cinema*, ed. Robin Blaetz (Durham: Duke University Press, 2007), p. 1. Commentators like Jonas Mekas and Michael Zryd have claimed that in America the term "experimental" was more apt than "avant-garde" until 1970, when critics familiar with European traditions began referring to it in that way. Still, if we credit Peter Bürger, whose *Theory of the Avant-Garde* (1974) defines the avant-garde in terms of its resistance to institutions, the pre-1970 period was *the* period when American experimental cinema had the most authenticity as an avant-garde. See Jonas Mekas, "Independence for independents," *Contemporary American Independent Film: From the Margins to the Mainstream*, ed. Chris Holmlund and Justin Wyatt (New York: Routledge, 2005), pp. 35-36; Michael Zryd, "Experimental Film and the Development of Film Study in America," *Inventing Film Studies*, ed. Lee Grieveson and Haidee Wasson (Durham: Duke University Press, 2008), pp. 182-185.

<sup>271</sup> This comes with a significant caveat, though: terms like "underground" have at times referred to popular avant-garde cults, like the New York Underground of the 1960s. On the use of the terms "experimental" and "underground," see Kovács, *Screening Modernism*, pp. 27-29.

<sup>272</sup> A.L. Rees, *A History of Experimental Film and Video: From the Canonical Avant-Garde to Contemporary British Practice* (London: BFI, 1999), pp. 30-31, 33; and Kovács, *Screening Modernism*, pp. 21-25. Kovács is valuable for how he touches on the origins of the split in art cinema between art films and avant-garde movies. To see recent examples of crossover critics who refer to both avant-garde movies and video art as forms of "art cinema," see Paul Young and Paul Duncan, eds., *Art Cinema* (Cologne: Taschen, 2009), pp. 9-10. See also Shyon Baumann, *Hollywood Highbrow: From Entertainment to Art* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2007), pp. 114-116. Baumann is important because he documents how the idea of film-as-art existed in the interwar periods mainly in avant-garde journals rather than in more mainstream discourses; thus, the idea of an "art cinema" was mainly an avant-garde perception until after the Second World War, when a confluence of events, including the wide distribution of state-subsidized foreign art films in the U.S., made "art cinema" a more mainstream phenomenon.

<sup>273</sup> For thorough reviews of this topic, see Steve Neale, "Art Cinema as Institution," *Screen* 22.1 (Spring 1981), pp. 11-39; Barbara Wilinsky, *Sure Seaters: The Emergence of Art House Cinema* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2001), pp. 33-40; and Kovács, *Screening Modernism*, pp. 7-32.

<sup>274</sup> Rees, *History of Experimental Film and Video*, p. 8. Kovács uses a distinct terminology that is similar in meaning. See, e.g., Kovács, *Screening Modernism*, pp. 27-32.

<sup>275</sup> Rees, *History of Experimental Film and Video*, p. 31. Kovács, *Screening Modernism*, pp. 23-24.

<sup>276</sup>

Rees, *History of Experimental Film and Video*, p. 51.

<sup>277</sup> Still, even before these necessities emerged, the impetus toward political content had forced much of the narrative avant-garde in more “normative directions,” as Rees puts it. Rees, *History of Experimental Film and Video*, p. 51.

<sup>278</sup> David James, *The Most Typical Avant-Garde: History and Geography of Minor Cinemas in Los Angeles* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2005), pp. 20-38.

<sup>279</sup> In an unpublished work-in-progress that draws on the ideas of Pierre Bourdieu, Chuck Kleinhans refers to the largely forgotten American experimental films made between 1921 and 1947 that film historian Lewis Jacobs cited in “Experimental Cinema in America: 1921-1947” (1947); these works include some fifteen films that Jacobs claimed were directly influenced by Dziga Vertov. Chuck Kleinhans, “Producing the Field of Experimental Film/Video, 2.7,” unpublished work-in-progress, pp. 4-5. Kleinhans wishes to acknowledge the contributions of B. Ruby Rich to an earlier formulation of this piece, which was presented as “Avant Garde and Radical Political Film in the U.S.” at the Society for Cinema Studies conference in March 1980 and subsequently published in the French journal *Cinémaction*. Chuck Kleinhans and B. Ruby Rich, “Le Cinéma d'avant-garde et ses rapports avec le cinéma militant,” trans. Katerina Thomadeki, *Cinémaction*, no. 10-11 (Spring/Summer 1980), pp. 55-68.

<sup>280</sup>

Mekas, “Independence,” p. 35.

<sup>281</sup> See Pauline Kael, “Movies, the Desperate Art” (1956), *Film: An Anthology*, ed. Daniel Talbot (1959; Berkeley: University of California Press, 1972), p. 70.

<sup>282</sup> See Arthur, *Line of Sight*, p. xv.

<sup>283</sup> See Haidee Wasson, *Museum Movies: The Museum of Modern Art and the Birth of Art Cinema* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2005) as well as the MOMA’s informational pages at <<http://www.moma.org/learn/resources/circulatingfilm>>.

<sup>284</sup> Though this interconnected history is increasingly covered by institutional histories such as *Film and Video Art*, ed. Stuart Comer (New York: Tate, 2009).

<sup>285</sup> For more on this subject, see Scott MacDonald, *Canyon Cinema: The Life and Times of an Independent Film Distributor* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2008).

<sup>286</sup> James, *The Most Typical Avant-Garde*, p. 205.

<sup>287</sup> Kathryn Ramey, “Between Art, Industry and Academia,” pp. 26-27.

<sup>288</sup> See, e.g., Peter Bürger, *Theory of the Avant-Garde* (1974; Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1984); the avant-garde’s anti-institutional bearing is central to this book. Bourdieu explains this resistance as a desire “at any price to avoid assimilation to bourgeois and the effect of social ageing it determines,” which leads in turn to the refusal of “the social signs of consecration—decoration, prizes, academies and all kinds of honours.” Pierre Bourdieu, *The Rules of Art: Genesis and Structure of the Literary Field* (1992), trans. Susan Emanuel (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1996), p. 123. On the relation of Bürger’s theory of the avant-garde to art cinema, see András Bálint Kovács, *Screening Modernism: European Art Cinema, 1950-1980* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2007), pp. 14-15.

<sup>289</sup> Wollen, “The Two Avant-Gardes,” p. 171.

<sup>290</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 172.

<sup>291</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 172-173. For a separate account of Wollen’s essay, see Kovács, *Screening Modernism*, pp. 29-30.

<sup>292</sup> Wollen, “The Two Avant-Gardes,” p. 173.

<sup>293</sup> *Ibid.*

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<sup>294</sup> Ibid., p. 175.

<sup>295</sup> Ibid.

<sup>296</sup> See Dennis Hanlon, "Traveling Theory, Shots, and Players: Jorge Sanjinés, New Latin American Cinema, and the European Art Film," *Global Art Cinema: New Theories and Histories*, ed. Rosalind Galt and Karl Schoonover (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010), pp. 353-355. Hanlon notes that the Third Cinema directors of the New Latin American Cinema tended to agree with Godard that he was "'trapped inside the fortress'" of Second Cinema (i.e., art cinema) despite the fact that he was very much an aesthetic revolutionary who also happened to be sympathetic to the politically revolutionary principles of Third Cinema; thus, they "understood Godard, Straub, and others as having succeeded in purging their filmic texts of bourgeois ideology" but "also felt that despite this achievement they had merely created a subset of bourgeois art cinema with revolutionary content, which became obvious when the audiences who went to see these films were taken into account." Hanlon, "Traveling Theory," p. 354.

<sup>297</sup> Of course, context makes a difference, since Godard films were not always shown in the same venues as Antonioni films. For example, in France, the films that Godard made between 1968 and 1972 were shown in relatively "funky" art-and-essay theaters, while Antonioni films of the same period were shown in the boulevard movie theaters. My gratitude to Chuck Kleinhans for pointing this out.

<sup>298</sup> For evidence of this influence, see the Frameworks archive at <<http://www.hi-beam.net/fw/index.html>>. It includes a number of references to *Riddles of the Sphinx*, including threads like this one: <<http://www.hi-beam.net/fw/fw40/0300.html>>. Accessed January 3, 2010.

<sup>299</sup> Ramey, "Between Art, Industry and Academia," p. 22.

<sup>300</sup> Ibid.

<sup>301</sup> Ibid., pp. 26-27.

<sup>302</sup> Ibid., p. 23.

<sup>303</sup> Ibid., p. 35.

<sup>304</sup> See Michael Zryd, "The Academy and the Avant-Garde: A Relationship of Dependence and Resistance," *Cinema Journal* 45.2 (Winter 2006), pp. 26-27, 28.

<sup>305</sup> I don't mean that Zryd is *intentionally* updating Ramey; after all, he cites a different piece by Ramey, and only just once. Zryd, "The Academy and the Avant-Garde," p. 24. And besides that, there is no necessary disjunction between these two essays. Ramey stresses the motivations and status games of *individuals* in experimental cinema while *also* theorizing the larger field. By contrast, Zryd concentrates on that larger field while simultaneously taking a more jaundiced view of the naïve and uncompromising avant-garde rhetoric articulated at the individual level. By looking at these pieces in tandem, we can see that the *field* of avant-garde cinema as a whole is quite secure, perhaps more secure than ever, even though the lives of its individual members are often marked by insecurity and economic hardship.

<sup>306</sup> Ibid., pp. 27-28.

<sup>307</sup> Bourdieu, *The Rules of Art*, p. 251.

<sup>308</sup> Ibid., p. 253.

<sup>309</sup> Ibid., pp. 123, 254.

<sup>310</sup> This is not to suggest that these filmmakers didn't often utilize the training and skill of others in their works; a perfect example is Deren's collaboration with Hammid, who was an experienced photographer and filmmaker in Czechoslovakia before immigrating to the U.S. in 1938. We should also recognize that homegrown avant-gardists don't count as "outsider artists" in the contemporary sense, for outsider artists are often presented as unfamiliar with art traditions. Though homegrown avant-gardists maintain their "apartness" from formal institutions, they must be aware of the history of their form if they are to surpass that history in the sense that Bourdieu sees as central to the avant-garde. Thus, filmmakers like Behrens are well aware of the accomplishments of predecessors like Brakhage or Baillie.

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<sup>311</sup> Kathryn Ramey, "Re: experimental cinema," personal e-mail to the author (December 26, 2009), p. 2.

<sup>312</sup> Bourdieu, *The Rules of Art*, p. 242-243. As Bourdieu notes here, the "reason the field has a directed and cumulative history is because the very intention of *surpassing* which properly defines the avant-garde is itself the result of a whole history, and because it is inevitably situated in relation to what it aims to surpass, that is, in relation to all the activities of surpassing which have occurred in the very structure of the field and in the space of possibles it imposes on new entrants." Bourdieu's italics.

<sup>313</sup> Ibid., pp. 28-29.

<sup>314</sup> Avant-garde authenticity works at two subcultural levels, i.e., in the avant-garde as a whole and in the world of high art (including art cinema), which are the only two subcultures in which the claims to such authenticity are likely to be recognized and understood. But though this kind of status claim is *legitimate* (i.e., supported by a range of accredited institutions), it does not have a broader *cultural* power, as more traditional art cinemas do, for it is rarely understood by wider audiences. This is why avant-garde fads, like cult fads, are often labeled "undergrounds": though one cinema is legitimate and the other illegitimate, these distinctions are seldom obvious to mainstream audiences. Hence, avant-garde cinema often requires an expert from a more broadly understood quarter, like the academy, the art world, or the festival circuit, to corroborate that it has legitimacy and value in high-culture subcultures.

<sup>315</sup> Bourdieu, *The Rules of Art*, pp. 253-254.

<sup>316</sup> Kleinbans, "Producing the Field," p. 3. For the way in which Sitney created the "dominant model" for looking at the New American Cinema—one that "is essentially an internal art history approach to the avant-garde"—see *ibid.*, pp. 3-4.

<sup>317</sup> P. Adams Sitney, *Visionary Film: The American Avant-Garde, 1943-2000* (1974; Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), p. 209. For more of this mythmaking in action, see the extended Brakhage homage, *Stan Brakhage: Correspondences*, that dominates a special double issue of *The Chicago Review* 47.4 and 48.1 (Winter 2001/Spring 2002).

<sup>318</sup> Colin Still, dir., "Brakhage on Brakhage I" (1996), documentary extra, *By Brakhage: An Anthology*, Disc 1 (Criterion Collection, 2004). Brakhage frequently ties his poverty to his purity and artistic focus in the four documentary segments included with this anthology of his works.

<sup>319</sup> Sitney, *Visionary Film*, p. 155.

<sup>320</sup> Sitney, *Visionary Film*, pp. 174, 209.

<sup>321</sup> See Jonas Mekas, "The First Statement of the New American Cinema Group," 1962, Film-Makers' Coop webpage. Available at <<http://www.film-makerscoop.com/history.htm>>. Accessed April 26, 2009.

<sup>322</sup> James, *The Most Typical Avant-Garde*, p. 203.

<sup>323</sup> Ibid.

<sup>324</sup> Zryd, "The Academy and the Avant-Garde," p. 27. See also the "Let's Remain Disorganizedly Organized" section of the first chapter of Paul Arthur's *A Line of Sight*, pp. 6-16.

<sup>325</sup> See Arthur, *A Line of Sight*, pp. 14-16.

<sup>326</sup> See Scott MacDonald, "Cinema 16: Documents Toward a History of the Film Society," *Wide Angle* 19.1 (January 1997), pp. 28-30. See also Arthur, *A Line of Sight*, pp. 6-16, and Ramey, "Between Art, Industry, and Academia," p. 25.

<sup>327</sup> MacDonald, "Cinema 16," p. 28.

<sup>328</sup> Jon Behrens, "Re: experimental cinema," personal e-mail to the author (December 14, 2009), p. 1.

<sup>329</sup> Bayma, "Art World Culture and Institutional Choices: The Case of Experimental Film," *The Sociological Quarterly* 36.1 (December 1995), p. 84.

<sup>330</sup> Quoted in *ibid.*

<sup>331</sup> Jon Behrens, "Re: experimental cinema," personal e-mail to the author (December 15, 2009), p. 1. See also Ramey, "Between Art, Industry, and Academia," pp. 26-27.

<sup>332</sup> I have heard experimentalists express similar sentiments on many occasions, one example of which I have in writing (though its author wishes to remain anonymous). Anonymous, "Re: experimental cinema," personal e-mail to the author (April 25, 2009), p. 1. Somewhat less often, I have come across evidence of various gatekeepers reacting against the peculiar venom that often greets their decisions in this field. (See, e.g., the thread on this subject in the Frameworks archive at <<http://www.hi-beam.net/fw/fw40/0313.html>>, dated June 11, 2009 and accessed January 3, 2010.)

<sup>333</sup> Ramey, "Between Art, Industry and Academia," p. 25.

<sup>334</sup> Quoted in Zryd, "The Academy and the Avant-Garde," p. 36, n. 13.

<sup>335</sup> Bourdieu, *The Rules of Art*, p. 254.

<sup>336</sup> For more, see Ramey, "Between Art, Industry, and Academia," pp. 25-26, 30-31, and Bayma, "Art World Culture and Institutional Choices," pp. 79-95. See also Bourdieu, *Rules of the Game*, pp. 122-123.

<sup>337</sup> Denis Dutton speculates that as a population people don't have the built-in capacities for such forms, which deviate too far from the tastes and tolerances of human nature. Instead, the taste for avant-garde art varies according to non-heritable factors like education. In this perspective, the avant-garde taste has to be re-learned with each new generation, rather than being passed on through reproduction. See Dutton, *The Art Instinct: Beauty, Pleasure, and Human Evolution* (New York: Bloomsbury Press, 2009), pp. 36-38.

<sup>338</sup> Quoted in Zryd, "The Academy and the Avant-Garde," p. 24. For details of *Spiral*'s brief existence in the Los Angeles of the 1980s, see James, *The Most Typical Avant-Garde*, p. 247.

<sup>339</sup> See, for example, Craig Fischer, "Experimental Film: The Contemporary Scene," <<http://www.filmreference.com/encyclopedia/Criticism-Ideology/Experimental-Film-THE-CONTEMPORARY-SCENE.html>>. Accessed April 13, 2009. See also Arthur, *A Line of Sight*, pp. 158-59.

<sup>340</sup> See Arthur, *A Line of Sight*, pp. 156-160; p. 158.

<sup>341</sup> This anti-institutional posture can have different outcomes, as a brief glance at the websites of Craig Baldwin's Other Cinema (<http://www.othercinema.com/>) and Andrea Grover's Aurora Picture Show (<http://www.aurorapictureshow.org/>) demonstrate.

<sup>342</sup> For example, in a telephone interview conducted on April 22, 2009, Andrea Grover of the Aurora Picture Show noted that her microcinema is devoted first to the artists, whom it has supported financially and around whom it has built a community, complete with outreach programs. She also indicated her intent to foment an anti-institutional atmosphere. Nevertheless, despite its user-friendliness and artist-friendliness, Aurora has been carefully programmed, complete with guest curation and in-house curation and an awards night that has honored high-profile experimentalists like William Wegman, Isaac Julien, Miranda July, and Steina and Woody Vasulka. For more, see the Aurora website, available at <[www.aurorapictureshow.org](http://www.aurorapictureshow.org)>. See also Ramey, "Between Art, Industry, and Academia," p. 29.

<sup>343</sup> As Grover explains, private foundations have fewer mandates have thus "represented Aurora's largest contributors to date"; by contrast, for "government funding, there are incentives to meet audience numbers in terms of diversity, tourists, seniors, and youth served, which means some programming has to have wide appeal." Government funding has also raised censorship concerns for Aurora. Andrea Grover, "Re: images and permission," personal e-mail to the author (January 1, 2010), p. 1.

<sup>344</sup> Zryd, "Experimental Film and the Development of Film Study in America," p. 200.

<sup>345</sup> Ramey, "Between Art, Industry, and Academia," p. 31.

<sup>346</sup> Ramey has noted that experimental filmmakers in fine-art positions can be forced by tenure pressures into making their art more conservative so as to win the particular institutional validations (e.g., at festivals "of a certain caliber") required by their tenure committees—a pressure that is only reinforced when their committees refuse to consider a candidate's scholarship, however penetrating it may be. Kathryn Ramey, "Re: experimental cinema," personal e-mail to the author (December 21, 2009), p. 2. That said, if the avant-

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gardist's insider status is based on a critical role (as in the case of Sitney or Arthur) rather than an artistic role (see Ramey), such obstacles might be easier to circumvent. That said, we should not underestimate the subtle difficulties that critic-scholars face when assimilating academic values.

<sup>347</sup> See Danny Birchall, "The Avant-Garde Archive Online," *Film Quarterly* 63.1 (Fall 2009), pp. 12-14. Of course, there have always been commercial distributors who have tried to circulate avant-garde films on a broader scale—e.g., see Freude Bartlett's Serious Business Company, which expired in 1983 after twelve years of specializing in avant-garde films, feminist films, and animation—but the Internet seems to have opened the avant-garde to a new and more commercial range of viewers in a more permanent way than has ever seemed possible before. For more on Bartlett, see John Hess and Chuck Kleinhans, "Doing Serious Business," Freud Bartlett inter., *Jump Cut* 31 (March 1986), pp. 30-34.

<sup>348</sup> See Arthur, *A Line of Sight*, pp. 111-131, and James, *The Most Typical Avant-Garde*, pp. 320-336.

<sup>349</sup> Arthur, *A Line of Sight*, p. 113.

## Chapter Eight / "Sucking" the Mainstream: *A Theory of Mainstream Art Cinema*

"It's an art movie, it doesn't count. We're talking about  
*movie movies* . . ."  
—*The Player* (Robert Altman, 1992)

So far, we have used the term "mainstream cinema" without really knowing what it is. This may be par for the course, since one function of this seemingly straightforward idea is to relax us into thinking that it is okay, even natural, to crowd gigantic groups of movies into a degraded "background" about which little is known but much is assumed. Using the phrase this way is a habit of convenience, for it helps us think about the movies as a complex whole. Unfortunately, this habit limits our understanding of how the "*movie movies*" that are lumped together as "mainstream cinema" relate to one another and how they relate to movies in other fields. The task of this chapter is to think against this habit so as to catch a glimpse of all that it obscures and how.

To do this, we must develop a context-dependent theory of "the mainstream" that sees it as an idea of "the average" or "the normal" that helps those engaged in discourse

on the cinema justify the value they ascribe to genres that seem outside the mainstream, like art cinema and cult cinema. Ironically, this tool gains its comparative power not by looking at the mainstream in depth but rather by ignoring the diversity and specialization that are inevitable aspects of any field large enough to be characterized as “mainstream.” But because of this complexity, mainstream cinemas and art cinemas always share areas of overlap, much as cult cinemas and art cinemas do. These overlaps are evident when we look at the dominant global mainstream, Hollywood cinema. In Hollywood, no stable distinction between “*movie* movies” and art movies is possible. Because this industry has long been specialized and hierarchical, it has given rise to all sorts of cinema, art cinema included. This chapter briefly surveys the many varieties of Hollywood movie that people have referred to as “art movies.” But because there are mainstreams outside Hollywood, we may also look for mainstream art cinemas in various world cinemas and cult cinemas. As it happens, these context-specific mainstreams have generated distinctive art cinemas of their own through their hierarchal subcultural processes.

### Theory of Mainstream Cinema

In most critical discourses on film, the utility of “mainstream” derives from its function as a modifier, a comparative, and not as a noun. The term’s nounal function imparts the idea that the mainstream is a stable “thing.” But in reality, the mainstream is not a thing but a complex idea of value that measures cultural tastes and individual tastes. Thus, in cinema, “mainstream” measures value in terms of prominence, dominance, and pervasiveness. It is also a highly uncharitable term that suggests an “ordinariness” about which little must be said. Still, we should bear in mind that the mainstream sector of any cinematic field is not strictly real. Indeed, different cultures, subcultures, and individuals

will see different mainstreams, just as they see different art cinemas and different cult cinemas. Ostensibly non-mainstream areas like art cinema and cult cinema, whose identification is often inflected by affirmative valuations, could not lend their objects positive value without the more subtle negative fetishization of “mainstream cinema.” After all, the phrase creates the illusion of a generalized background against which the virtues of an oppositional cinema may be foregrounded.<sup>350</sup>

What are the complaints against mainstream cinema? Usually, they consist of the following: that mainstream cinema is driven by greed or egotism, not aesthetics, and that it is as a result homogeneous and generic, lacking the authenticity, the idiosyncrasy and complexity, that we equate with oppositional cinemas. Such complaints are often found in art movies about filmmaking such as Jean-Luc Godard’s *Le mépris* (1963) and Robert Altman’s *The Player* (1992). Godard embeds a critique of the new global mainstream in *Le mépris*, implicitly separating the two, by demonizing Hollywood through the figure of Jeremy Prokosch (Jack Palance), a ruthless, unimaginative American producer who corrupts the creative process as smoothly as he seduces the protagonist’s wife. In the sly American movie *The Player*, Altman lampoons Hollywood by depicting its producers as interested in the artistic status of their own projects only insofar as they are interested in marketing those projects through tag lines like “movies *are* art—*now*, more than ever.” But there is an insecurity in these intellectual metafictionalizations that makes such criticism ring false. Godard was creating a fairly big-budget, star-driven, Euro-American co-production with Jack Palance and Brigitte Bardot. And Altman’s movie contained over sixty cameos by Hollywood stars and power brokers; he even pitched *The Player* to Hollywood studios before raising the financing himself and distributing the movie through New Line, a label

that was independent for only a few more years. These films had to distance themselves from Hollywood, it seems, because they were so close to it.

But neither movie really *looks* at Hollywood movies. Instead, they use the profit motive that drives many aspects of Hollywood as a reason for impugning the aesthetic quality of its products; and they take it for granted that art movies are seldom driven by commercialism, despite their development of stars and their use of entertaining, realistic stories that are meant to thrive in particular distribution channels. We may find the same assumptions in academic articles. For example, in “Guess Who’s Off the Hook: Inventing Interracial Coupling in Global Art Cinema” (2009), Jayson Baker belittles Hollywood as lacking the complexity and boldness to deal with racial mixing honestly.<sup>351</sup> This essay—which looks at the shallowness of “American films” primarily through one film, Stanley Kramer’s *Guess Who’s Coming to Dinner* (1967)—spends its energy exploring foreign art films such as Godard’s *Le petit soldat* (1960), Tomas Gutierrez Alea’s *Memories of Underdevelopment* (1968), and Rainer Werner Fassbinder’s *Ali: Fear Eats the Soul* (1974). This pejorative treatment need not benefit the traditional art cinemas only. It can also benefit cult cinema or any oppositional cinema. Consider Lloyd Kaufman’s self-promoting essay “I.A.: I-Won’t-Suck-the-Mainstream Art” (2002). Kaufman is the founder of Troma, the studio that has given us classics like *The Toxic Avenger* (1984) and *Teenage Catgirls in Heat* (1997). In his piece, Kaufman claims that “Troma has never sucked the mainstream.” He means that his studio has never “gone Hollywood,” which would amount to artistic prostitution, compromising his vision for cash. This view also entails his belief that a mainstream Hollywood hit such as *Pretty Woman* (1990) “should have been subtitled: *Girls who suck will be in luck*.”<sup>352</sup>

I offer these examples not to embarrass anyone but to show how the mystifying usage of the term “mainstream cinema” generally works to the benefit of individuals and movies located in subcultures defined as outside the mainstream. Few scholars approach “mainstream” this way, preferring to see it as a noun, as a thing, and not as a comparative process yielding subcultural distinction. As a result, the ideas of “the mainstream” that scholars deploy are seldom constructed logically. But the situation is improving. Mark Jancovich has shown that, in areas like cult discourse, “the mainstream” is not a fixed, well-defined object, but “an undefined and vaguely imaged Other.”<sup>353</sup> And Joanne Hollows and Jacinda Read have demonstrated that the cult nexus is heavy on masculinity talk and that “the mainstream” is often depicted there as a passive, feminized Other.<sup>354</sup> What is most telling about this recent (albeit still uncommon) strand of research is that it indicates that mainstream cinema has long been a flexible punching bag. Cult fans are apt to lump art films and their promoters into this despised category—for in the eyes of cult fans, these things and people represent the dominant, the traditional, “the mainstream.” Traditional cinephiles, by contrast, are far more apt to lump cult movies and their fans into this category—for in their eyes, these *déclassé* things and people are corrupted by commercial motives and by their affinity for genre conventions.<sup>355</sup>

The fact is, though, that there is no reason to think that these genre terms must be distinct from one another. As I have noted, “mainstream cinema,” “art cinema,” “cult cinema,” and “world cinema” make the most sense when they refer to overlapping super-genres. But these ideas are so plastic that they may be used in various ways, all of which are reasonable. Here it helps, I believe, to reduce these usages to their two main variables: the classifier’s institutional role and the specifics of the field under review. An American

feminist critic looking at feminist art films might very well label Jane Campion's *The Piano* an example of "the postfeminist mainstream" while labeling Chantal Akerman's *Jeanne Dielman, 23 Quai du Commerce, 1080 Bruxelles* (1975), an "experimental feminist art film." This does not mean that this critic has permanently devalued *The Piano*, which she might need to label an "art film" were she to widen her field to include all narrative features, not just feminist art movies, or if she were working in a cinephilic capacity for the AFI, the BFI, or *Sight & Sound*. On the other hand, if cult critics were focused on a low-profile segment of cult cinema, they might identify Troma movies as a mainstream cult cinema, based on their distribution through centralized outlets like Hollywood Video and their normalcy *vis-à-vis* more outré labels, like After Hours and/or Factory 2000, with their fetish-oriented stress on the strangulation video. My point is that a mainstream field is always more complex than the term "mainstream" indicates, so a critic who looks quite closely at such a field may find another mainstream cinema—or another art cinema or another cult cinema—within it, just as we have found many such cinemas within art cinema as a whole. This variability is what makes it possible to consider the concept of "a mainstream art cinema," which may be defined as an area of cinema wherein a set of films somehow distinguished as "mainstream" seems to conflict in a value-oriented way with its own "mainstream-ness."

When introducing the idea of mainstream art cinema, it helps to begin by focusing on another maligned term: "Hollywood." Few scholars who use the term "mainstream Hollywood" pejoratively demonstrate mastery of the studio system as it has evolved over the past century. Indeed, even a swift overview is sufficient to establish that Hollywood is more complex than this usage implies. By acknowledging this complexity—which has

given us specialized types of Hollywood art movie like “the prestige picture” and “the indie-style art film”—we position ourselves to understand how mainstream art cinema manifests through subphenomena like “Hollywood art cinema.” Indeed, the perception of the conflicted state of “the Hollywood art movie” results from the contradiction between a cultural commonplace (*Hollywood makes ordinary movies*) and a personal judgment (*this Hollywood movie is extraordinary*). In the end, these perceptions would not be so routine were Hollywood not more complex than its critics suggest.

### What *Is* Hollywood, Anyway?

For ninety-some years, the idea of a global mainstream cinema has been identified with Hollywood. Those who by preference or necessity have found themselves outside this mainstream have seldom painted a happy picture of it. To them, Hollywood is a place of compromise, of prostitution and betrayal; it is a place where, as Kaufman has implied, people bend down or bend over and still get stabbed in the back either way.<sup>356</sup> Given this rhetoric, which has so much in common with Frankfurt School notions of “the culture industry,” it is no wonder that Hollywood has so often been cast in paranoid terms as a “mechanical monster” or as a sinister “System,” smug stereotypes that industry insider Joan Didion has lampooned as tantamount to the belief that Hollywood is “programmed to stifle and destroy all that is interesting and worthwhile and ‘creative’ in the human spirit,” leaving only empty products for empty people.<sup>357</sup>

But we don’t need this rhetoric to understand that the association of “Hollywood” and “the mainstream” does have common sense on its side. Since the 1920s, Hollywood has dominated the global box office—and, as a result, its sales agents have dominated the global distribution of films. But I wonder how much statements like this really tell us about the movies themselves. If Jancovich is right, using “mainstream” as a traditional

shorthand for Hollywood only deepens our confusion. This is why he has rejected Jeffrey Sconce's conflation of these two terms ("rather than investigate the contradictory and problematic nature of this [mainstream] concept, [Sconce] conflates it with an equally problematic term, 'Hollywood,' which he defines as 'an economic and artistic institution that represents not just a body of films, but a particular mode of film production and its accompanying signifying practices'"<sup>358</sup>). Mind you, I am not suggesting that we abandon the conflation of these terms altogether, for such a goal would be unrealistic. It would be pointless to separate "mainstream" and "Hollywood." But we do need a definition of each term that is so precise and so concise that even when we conflate these concepts in passing we may do so with clear respect for the complexity that each term encapsulates. Obviously, I am working toward a new definition of "mainstream" throughout this piece; but what is a more accurate definition of "Hollywood"?

Even in the literature, Hollywood's basic reality remains a matter of debate.<sup>359</sup> It is not enough to say that Hollywood cinema has been the movie business conducted by the Big Five—and now the Big Six, counting Disney—major studios during the classical and postclassical eras. In the later period, Hollywood studios have been conglomerate-owned and, apart from Disney, answerable to executives whose offices are located in New York, not Hollywood. Thus, in that era, there has never been a full stop between the multimedia dealings of a parent company such as Viacom or Time Warner and those of a studio like Paramount or Warner Brothers. Partnerships like these have enabled studios to cross-promote their narrative features and to profit handsomely from tie-ins. What we need to see in these partnerships is an example of the drift toward specialization that has been a consistent feature of the Hollywood studio system almost since its inception. Hollywood

today may not be as solid in its vertical integration as it was in its classical heyday, but it is, as Tino Balio documents, more horizontally integrated across the globe,<sup>360</sup> and it has over time sought more specialized markets and more specialized products as its domestic and global audiences have grown increasingly segmented.

Today, the major studios function mainly as distributors and financiers and not as production companies that control studio lots, contract players, and places of exhibition. Thus, most Hollywood insiders can now honestly claim some level of autonomy from the industry. Yet its executives can also, as John Thornton Caldwell shows, claim some level of control over vast distribution networks.<sup>361</sup> This flexible control extends not just to the majors' specialty divisions but also to the more-or-less independent companies that still do business with the majors and that still receive talent, equipment, financing, and even distribution through them. It also extends deep into foreign markets, where Hollywood executives have sold their own films through partial control of distribution channels and production labels.<sup>362</sup> As Balio, Richard Maltby, and Justin Wyatt have shown, Hollywood is today undergirded by the economics of the blockbuster or "tent-pole project," which is a spectacle-based, high-concept, ultra-high-budget feature. The global box-office of the blockbuster has in the post-Code era helped Hollywood weather losses sustained from films that have not done well.<sup>363</sup> Many of these films are fairly standardized, much as the films made in the classical Hollywood once were. But there is also a great deal of variety and idiosyncrasy built into contemporary Hollywood through the specialized, global reach of its post-classical business model—which has, to borrow Balio's phrase, sought a "major presence in all of the world's important markets."<sup>364</sup>

Given its macro and micro-reaches, contemporary Hollywood cannot be reduced to a routinized assembly-line factory system. This stereotype—like much of the rhetoric that is attached to it—is either a conceptual relic that is rooted in an outdated conception of Hollywood or a gross simplification that reduces contemporary Hollywood to a maker of high-concept blockbusters. For the fact is that Hollywood has made contributions to almost *every* kind of narrative cinema, including those that are far from what most people label “the Hollywood mainstream.”<sup>365</sup> The term “Hollywood” in effect encompasses an astonishing degree of historical diversity, and this diversity has increasingly included specialized segments, like today’s indie-style art labels. All we may say of Hollywood, then, is that it has produced and distributed narrative films, whose market appeal it has sought to maximize. To call all these products “Hollywood” is to indicate that they share a common funding source, not a common form or aesthetic.

The next section looks at two types of art movie produced in Hollywood: one that embraces its origins in “low” genre vehicles and one that is ambivalent, even scornful, of such origins. In the first category, we may place genre vehicles by classical Hollywood directors who influenced the auteur critics (who in turn spurred the postwar new waves). But we may also place other vehicles within this category, from the lean genre movies of a Samuel Peckinpah or Clint Eastwood to the grandiose art blockbusters of contemporary directors like Tim Burton, David Russell, and David Fincher. In the second category, we may put movies bearing various kinds of European influence. The first kind of art movie, including the prestige pictures of Hollywood’s golden era and many films directed by European exiles prior to the 1950s, seem at worst ambivalent about their reliance on genre conventions. But there is open contempt for these conventions in the art movies of

the second category, including the Hollywood-financed, Euro-American art films of the 1960s, the New Hollywood art films of the 1970s, and the indie-style art films that came to the fore in the 1990s and that continue to circulate today.

### Mainstream Hollywood Art Cinemas

As areas of generic overlap, Hollywood art cinemas function as “real” mainstream cinemas and as “real” art cinemas. Thus, it is perfectly reasonable to think of indie-style movies as mainstream art movies and as traditional art films. Still, these mainstream art cinemas represent different kinds of cultural and subcultural distinction depending on their context. Hollywood insiders consider them a distinguished kind of industrial output. This is one reason that the indie-style art movies have won so many Oscars over the last two decades.<sup>366</sup> But viewed from art-world contexts that may include the avant-garde, the proximity of these art cinemas to Hollywood can call their own legitimacy into question. Thus, these quasi-legitimate cinemas are marked by insecurity *vis-à-vis* more “authentic” art forms and display this insecurity through their self-conscious attacks on Hollywood, which is at once their principal support and primary anxiety.

What is curious is just how important Hollywood movies were to the postwar new waves that cinephiles have accorded automatic respect. I am not talking about the general influence of an early Hollywood auteur like D.W. Griffith or that of a Hollywood classic like *Citizen Kane* (1941). Instead, I am talking about the elevation of John Ford, Alfred Hitchcock, Billy Wilder, Nicholas Ray, and other Hollywood directors according to the auteur criteria circulated by *Cahiers du cinéma* before the French New Wave was fully underway. These Hollywood directors made movies that seemed mainstream in their codes and their distribution. But they were, for the auteur critics, distinguished from the

run of Hollywood directors in their stylistic control and in their production assignments, which had them at least helping their writers. Such control distinguished these directors not only from their more mainstream colleagues but from the mainstream directors of the French cinema. By finding auteurism in this mainstream cinema, the auteur critics helped legitimate the belief that all cinema was art and that any cinema, even the most popular, could be art cinema. This idea led critics like Andrew Sarris to blaze the cinephilic path along which so many of today's critics are still wending.

Interestingly, before the ideas of the auteur critics took root in the U.S., American critics like Manny Farber were already praising the “soldier-cowboy-gangster directors,” including Ford, Anthony Mann, Raoul Walsh, and Howard Hawks.<sup>367</sup> Farber betrayed his insecurity *vis-à-vis* the French critics and other intellectuals by resenting the incursion of “serious art” into the “masculine” sphere of the action film. For that reason, he invented an idiosyncratic auteur criticism that distinguished between an authentic Hollywood underground on the one hand and an effete idea of “Cinemah” on the other. His attitude would sound like the sexist elitism that Hollows and Read identify with the cult critic except that Farber was a mainstream critic who focused on mainstream directors and who published in mainstream forums. And he did not praise outsiders. Instead, he focused on the oppositional *insiders* he deemed responsible for making covertly valuable movies. “Hawks and his group are perfect examples of the anonymous artist,” Farber wrote. “To go at his most expedient gait, the Hawks type must take a withdrawn, almost hidden stance. . . his films seem to come from the most neutral, humdrum, monotonous corner of the movie lot.” These craftsmen taught viewers that “the obvious in art is a losing game.”

For Farber, then, the “sharpest work” was most likely to be created by “the most unlikely, self-destructing, uncompromising, roundabout artists.”<sup>368</sup>

Had he been writing later, Farber might have used this “mainstream elitism” to elevate Peckinpah and unprepossessing movies like *The Ballad of Cable Hogue* (1970), *Junior Bonner* (1972), *The Getaway* (1972), and *Bring Me the Head of Alfredo Garcia* (1974). Celebrated as a “self-destructing, uncompromising” auteur who crafted a violent, misogynist art cinema in *The Wild Bunch* (1969) and *Straw Dogs* (1971), Peckinpah was a genre director whose lean projects resisted the “obvious in art.” But like Hawks, he distinguished himself from other genre directors; and like Eastwood, he distinguished himself from the New Hollywood directors that rejected genre. Which is to say Eastwood has continued the unprepossessing tradition of Hawks, Ford, and Peckinpah through the mainstream art movies that he crafted in late career for Warner. Films like *Unforgiven* (1992), *Mystic River* (2003), *Gran Torino* (2008), and *Invictus* (2009) have the raw and “unpretentious” vigor Farber admired. They create the illusion of coming straight from the popular Hollywood genres that these directors loved.<sup>369</sup>

But there is today a different kind of art movie in Hollywood that embraces even more of the qualities that have caused mainstream cinephiles to feel insecure, such as big budgets, big grosses, and special effects. This art cinema may be found in the output of directors like Burton, Russell, Fincher, Michael Mann, Steven Soderbergh, Christopher Nolan, etc., who have all made art blockbusters in today’s Hollywood system. This big-budget format has meant that these directors have had to offer viewers accessible stories full of clarity, flash, and vigor, i.e., all the hard-wired pleasures of the cinema. Yet they have also managed to please their critics, who have been impressed by their legends at

least as much as their stylistic palettes.<sup>370</sup> For most of them have seemed to follow a fairly standard script. For example, Soderbergh contributed to the explosion of the American indie movement through *sex, lies, and videotape* (1989), and Nolan generated acclaim through indie films like *The Following* (1996) and *Memento* (2000). But in this narrative, Soderbergh, Nolan, and the others were later “coopted” or “seduced” by Hollywood into making blockbusters, a process that put new constraints on their auteur control (as if they would have has no constraints otherwise!). In the standard script, the directors managed despite such constraints to make art blockbusters—like Burton’s *Edward Scissorhands* (1990) and *The Legend of Sleepy Hollow* (1999); Russell’s *Three Kings* (1999) and *I Heart Huckabees* (2004); Fincher’s *Fight Club* (2000), *Zodiac* (2007), and *The Curious Case of Benjamin Button* (2008); Mann’s *Heat* (1995), *Miami Vice* (2006), and *Public Enemies* (2009); Soderbergh’s *Traffic* (2000) and *Solaris* (2002); and Nolan’s *The Prestige* (2006), *The Dark Knight* (2008), and *Inception* (2010)—all of which resembled genre films as much as indie-style art films. Most of these blockbusters have been very profitable; e.g., the *The Dark Knight*, which cost an estimated \$185 million to make, had grossed \$533 million in the U.S. alone by February 2009.<sup>371</sup>

These, then, are the Hollywood art cinemas that clearly produce *movie* movies. But what I find most interesting about these cinemas is that they have been accorded so little respect, even by Hollywood. This disrespect was highlighted at the 2009 Academy Awards, which failed to nominate *The Dark Knight* for Best Picture or Best Director, despite the fact that the film had gobs of acclaim and a huge ad campaign behind it. There are many reasons for this phenomenon, the biggest being these movies’ reliance on genre and their tremendous audience success. Art cinema is a a comparatively anti-genre super-

genre, so cinephiles have tended to look askance at auteur productions that are also successful genre vehicles. But as Thomas Schatz has demonstrated, Hollywood, like many other quasi-legitimate and illegitimate cinemas, has always asked its auteurs to work within genre constraints at least some of the time.<sup>372</sup> This necessity of mainstream art cinema is in fact one reason that the word “American,” as associated with the word “Hollywood,” has generated so many negative implications from directors in the global film industry. Consequently, in the view of Australian director Fred Schepisi, the most originality that a foreign-born director can expect in Hollywood is an originality that grows organically from Hollywood genre conventions.<sup>373</sup>

The issue of birthplace is pertinent in that foreigners have faced similar dilemmas all the way back to the silent era. Thus, many European directors exiled in the 1930s and 1940s first attempted to work outside genre formats. But Schatz makes a good point in insisting that emigrés like Fritz Lang, Ernst Lubitsch, Douglas Sirk, and Max Ophüls adapted very “effectively to Hollywood’s genre-based system,” doing some of their most acclaimed work in it, just as American directors like Hawks, Ford, Vincente Minnelli, and Otto Preminger did.<sup>374</sup> What is intriguing is that even European directors who flouted genre conventions were accorded a measure of respect from Hollywood insiders due to their Europeanness while facing a measure of skepticism from Hollywood outsiders for their willingness to work in Hollywood at all. A similar pattern may be seen in cinephile reactions to the Euro-American co-productions that emerged during the 1960s, when the classical Hollywood model was in steep decline. Hollywood-financed co-productions like Michelangelo Antonioni’s *Blow-Up* (1966), which was a desultory, art-obsessed thriller, borrowed aspects of the art films that had made their directors’ reputations while also

borrowing commercial aspects from popular genres. Many of these co-productions have at this point been accorded classic status. But as I indicate in Chapter Five, they have also struggled to rebut questions concerning their authenticity—questions that have arisen due to their links to American money and to American genres.

Mainstream art cinema has been securing an even more qualified form of this distinction since Hollywood began awarding Oscars in 1929. Indeed, from the 1930s to the 1950s, an entire category of Hollywood production, the “prestige picture,” gathered distinction in the mainstream, whether through the Academy Awards or specialized kinds of exhibition. As *Time* magazine noted in 1937, the “cinema has a special category for what it calls ‘prestige pictures.’ Made with an eye to pleasing serious critics, these productions are intended primarily to stimulate the self-respect rather than fill the purses of their makers.”<sup>375</sup> Film historian Chris Cagle has argued that these “middlebrow” art movies developed in two stages, paving the way for the more European aspirationalism of the New Hollywood.<sup>376</sup> Shyon Baumann concurs with this, noting that even though prestige productions did not seek the same high-art mantle as the later auteur productions, they did contribute “to the eventual redefinition of film as an artistic genre.”<sup>377</sup> But, as *Time* suggested, the danger of these pointedly literary movies was that they could lose money by striking viewers as “bores.” The executives of the classical Hollywood wanted even prestige productions to be seen as “entertainment,” not “art,” for they were afraid that self-indulgent, aspirational films that strayed too far from classical realism or popular genres might neglect the most common tastes of mass audiences, subtracting from their bottom lines. They wanted the distinction of art, but only if they could keep it in a box where it did not threaten the business of entertainment.

These dynamics were drastically altered due to the postwar popularity of the new waves, which seemed to give Hollywood a way out of its postwar decline. Thus, since the 1960s, executives have had less aversion to placing their movies in aspirational contexts, and Hollywood auteurs have become more contemptuous of Hollywood genre traditions. This pattern was most apparent during the New Hollywood era, when art cinema virtually overran Hollywood.<sup>378</sup> But contemporary Hollywood has righted itself through its careful development of specialty divisions—although the indie-style movies of Miramax, New Line, October, and other art divisions have been as happy to condescend to Hollywood as Godard and Altman were. Two salient points may be drawn. First, through the indie-style movie, Hollywood has put art cinema back in its box, creating a more sustainable system than was evident during the New Hollywood. Secondly, both the New Hollywood and the specialty divisions have still had to dodge questions of authenticity, despite their anti-Hollywood postures and European influences.<sup>379</sup> Indeed, not even the utterly distinctive Hollywood art movies of Terrence Malick have fully transcended the many questions of authenticity that have surrounded “mainstream art cinema.”

### Mainstream Art Cinemas Outside Hollywood

If these segments of Hollywood represent reasonable constructions of mainstream art cinema, we should acknowledge that this phenomenon can also be found in complex mainstream fields outside Hollywood. Anywhere that we find a metaphorical version of Hollywood, we might also find some kind of mainstream art cinema. These metaphorical Hollywoods exist not only in other nations but within alternative cinematic traditions, such as those grouped under the rubric of “cult cinema.”

One excellent example of a mainstream cinema that parallels Hollywood was the classic French studio system and “the tradition of quality” against which French auteur critics like François Truffaut rebelled. Clearly, we should not just take the opinions of the auteur critics as the final word on these phenomena. Indeed, many French directors still consider these French traditions among the grandest in international filmmaking. As cult auteur Pascal Laugier recently put it, “[b]esides Hollywood, in the ’40s French cinema was simply the best cinema in the world. It’s impossible as a young French director not to be influenced by geniuses such as Julien Duvivier or Henri-Georges Clouzot.”<sup>380</sup> What I would suggest is that “quality” filmmakers like Duvivier, Clouzot, René Clément, and Claude Autant-Lara—none of whom François Truffaut favors in “A Certain Tendency of the French Cinema”—form an art-cinema segment inside the mainstream French cinema of the period.<sup>381</sup> For example, Clouzot, director of *Les diaboliques* (1954), and Clément, who made *Jeux interdits* (1952), won festival awards and served on juries at the same time that their works, which often relied on genre conventions, were proving popular in a domestic studio system that was the French Hollywood.<sup>382</sup>

But we should not limit these investigations to the U.S. and France. Movies seen as fitting into the mainstream in their native contexts are often perceived as art films once they are exported through global distribution circuits. One example of such a movie is the recent Oscar winner for best foreign-language film, *In a Better World* (2010), directed by Susanne Bier, which *Newsweek* and *The New York Times* cited as an example of an art film that in its home context was interpreted as evidence of the “Hollywoodization” of Danish films (and of Dogme directors).<sup>383</sup> Indeed, *many* European “art” movies have also been perceived as “mainstream” depending on their context. This duality qualifies them

as one variety of contemporary mainstream art cinema. But this phenomenon is manifest in other European cinemas as well. For example, film scholar Mary Wood perceives the contemporary European “quality” film as a comparatively mainstream cinema that “has developed out of art cinema practice and represents an attempt by European filmmakers to compete with big-budget U.S. films.”<sup>384</sup> And similar phenomena exist outside Europe, too. In Iran, for instance, directors like Nasser Taghvaei and Ali Hatami have made “popular art films,” a category that is more commercial than the Iranian New Waves but that includes films by artists in those traditions, like Daryoush Mehrjui, director of *The Cow* (1969).<sup>385</sup> Another case is “middle cinema” in the Hindi tradition, where auteurs like Hrishikesh Mukherjee, Shyam Benegal, Mani Ratnam, and Guru Dutt have made movies whose niche is between the state-sponsored New Wave (or “Parallel Cinema”) and the more accessible and commercial movies of Bollywood.<sup>386</sup> The work of such directors may be classified in the U.S. as “world mainstream art cinemas.”

If this concatenation of value terms sounds strange, there are even odder ones to consider. For instance, in the cult nexus, we might refer to “mainstream cult art cinemas,” which we could conceptualize as *the art-cinema segments of the mainstream segments of cult subgenres*. Here we would have to adjust our ideas of the mainstream according to subcultural indices, not national or cultural ones. The most mainstream element of contemporary American softcore is, e.g., a tradition that I have elsewhere classified as “corporate softcore” and distinguished according to theme, style, budget, and studio.<sup>387</sup> In softcore, the most crucial labels were once Playboy, MRG, and New City, which between 1997 and 2003 formed a low-budget softcore “Hollywood.” Though this mainstream softcore tended toward a weightless postfeminism, it did include an adversarial element.

This was exemplified when Playboy auteur Tom Lazarus mocked the unimaginativeness of his distributors and executive producers, railing against the corporate limits they put on his creativity.<sup>388</sup> Nevertheless, he remained at Playboy, where he had \$300,000 budgets at his disposal for subculturally acclaimed films like *Word of Mouth* (1999), *House of Love* (2000), and *Voyeur Confessions* (2002).<sup>389</sup> Though Lazarus might have had more liberty at a more underground softcore label like Seduction Cinema, he would have had less money there, crimping his ability to craft the stylized realism that he favored. Lazarus was, then, a cult auteur who in a sense chose to “suck the mainstream.”

If we follow this context-shifting path, we will see that there are potentially as many mainstream art cinemas as there are mainstream cinematic fields. But we need not look at every mainstream cinema to understand this. All we need to remember is that the idea of a “mainstream art cinema” results, first and foremost, from the deceptive function of the idea of “the mainstream,” which, in intellectual discourse on the cinema, typically obscures the complexity of a comparatively large field to the benefit of fields defined as outside “the mainstream.” But classifiers *in* that mainstream will have the ambition and the ability to make field-specific distinctions. They will applaud certain styles and themes while seeing others as more mainstream, more humdrum, more worthy of neglect. But we may shift this context-dependent discourse in other directions, too. From certain angles—avant-garde ones in particular—even postwar new waves may be considered “mainstream art cinemas.” There is, then, no end to the mainstreams that may be discerned within the cinema and no non-contingent “degradation” in any of them.<sup>390</sup>

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<sup>350</sup>NOTES TO CHAPTER EIGHT

<sup>350</sup>As Michael Z. Newman puts it, the “mainstream” is “a category that niche cultures or subcultures construct to have something against which to define themselves and generate their cultural or subcultural capital.” Consequently, Newman does “not believe that there is a mainstream that exists independent of this

process of classification.” Michael Z. Newman, *Indie: An American Film Culture* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2011), p. 5.

<sup>351</sup>

Jayson Baker, “Guess Who’s Off the Hook: Inventing Interracial Coupling in Global Art Cinema,” *Wide Screen*, vol. 1, no. 1 (April 2009), pp. 1-14.

<sup>352</sup>

Lloyd Kaufman, “I.A.: I-Won’t-Suck-the-Mainstream Art,” *Underground U.S.A.: Filmmaking Beyond the Hollywood Canon*, ed. Xavier Mendik and Steven Jay Schneider (London: Wallflower, 2002), p. xiv.

<sup>353</sup>

Mark Jancovich *et al.*, “Introduction,” *Defining Cult Movies*, ed. Mark Jancovich *et al.* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2003), p. 1. See also Newman, *Indie*, p. 212.

<sup>354</sup> See, e.g., Joanne Hollows, “The Masculinity of Cult,” and Jacinda Read, “The Cult of Masculinity: From Fan-Boys to Academic Bad-Boys,” in *Defining Cult Movies*, ed. Mark Jancovich *et al.* (Manchester University Press, 2003), pp. 35-37 and 54-70, respectively.

<sup>355</sup> The latter tendency goes back to the class-driven manifestos of highbrows like Clement Greenberg and Dwight MacDonal. See Clement Greenberg, “Avant-garde and Kitsch” (1939), *Mass Culture: The Popular Arts in America*, ed. Bernard Rosenberg and David Manning White (1957; New York: Free-Macmillan, 1964), pp. 98-107. See also Dwight Macdonald, *Against the American Grain* (New York: Random House, 1962), p. 54.

<sup>356</sup>

Kaufman, “I-Won’t-Suck,” p. xiv.

<sup>357</sup> Joan Didion, *Slouching Towards Bethlehem* (New York: Farrar, Straus, and Giroux, 1968), p. 150.

<sup>358</sup> Mark Jancovich, “Cult fictions: Cult Movies, Subcultural Capital and the Production of Cultural Distinctions” (2002), *The Cult Film Reader*, ed. Ernest Mathijs and Xavier Mendik (New York: Open University Press, 2008), p. 152.

<sup>359</sup> For example, see Steve Neale and Murray Smith, “Introduction,” *Contemporary Hollywood Cinema*, ed. Steve Neale and Murray Smith (London: Routledge, 1998), pp. xiv-xv.

<sup>360</sup> See Tino Balio, “‘A Major Presence in all of the World’s Important Markets’: The Globalization of Hollywood in the 1990s,” *Contemporary Hollywood Cinema*, ed. Steve Neale and Murray Smith (London: Routledge, 1998), pp. 61-62.

<sup>361</sup> See John Thornton Caldwell, *Production Culture: Industrial Reflexivity and Critical Practice in Film and Television* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2008).

<sup>362</sup> Balio, “‘A Major Presence,’” pp. 59-64.

<sup>363</sup> Ibid., pp. 58-59. See Richard Maltby, “‘Nobody Knows Everything’: Post-Classical Historiographies and Consolidated Entertainment,” *Contemporary Hollywood Cinema*, ed. Steve Neale and Murray Smith (London: Routledge, 1998), p. 37; see also Justin Wyatt, *High Concept: Movies and Marketing in Hollywood* (Austin: Texas UP, 1994).

<sup>364</sup> I borrow this phrase from Balio. See Balio, “‘A Major Presence,’” p. 58.

<sup>365</sup> Two examples: during the early 1990s, Paramount was the major distributor of cult studio Full Moon Pictures, which at that time featured a softcore label (Torchlight); and in 1989, Warner Brothers even held the American video rights for Troma’s sequel to *The Toxic Avenger*.

<sup>366</sup> Consider, for example, that Harvey Weinstein’s films have over the past decades secured almost 300 Oscar nominations and over 60 wins all by themselves; many of these movies were produced through labels with Hollywood affiliations.

<sup>367</sup> Manny Farber, “Underground Films” (1957), *Film: An Anthology*, ed. Daniel Talbot (1959; Berkeley: University of California Press, 1972), p. 163.

<sup>368</sup> Ibid., pp. 165, 166. Farber's incipient auteurism clearly represents a mid-point in the transition from cultural perceptions of Hollywood as a site of entertainment and craft to perceptions of it as a potential site of genius and high art. See Shyon Baumann, *Hollywood Highbrow: From Entertainment to Art* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2007), pp. 60-63.

<sup>369</sup> That these Eastwood films are a form of art cinema may even be seen in the details of their exhibition. For example, I saw both *Unforgiven* and *Gran Torino* in arthouses—but it is worth pointing out that even there their Hollywood connections were emphasized, as when *Gran Torino* was segregated into an “Oscar Worthy” category by the University of Chicago’s Doc Films on its Spring 2009 film schedule. In other words, these movies seem to form a “middle art cinema.”

<sup>370</sup> These films have received no shortage of praise, for there are many, as Baumann puts it, “who would argue that some blockbuster productions are true art.” Baumann, *Hollywood Highbrow*, p. 168. Manohla Dargis of *The New York Times* has called similar movies, like Michael Mann’s *Public Enemies* (2009), “big-budget art movies.” See Manohla Dargis, “Seduction by Machine Gun,” *The New York Times* (July 1, 2009), online review. Available <<http://movies.nytimes.com/2009/07/01/movies/01enemies.html?8dpc>>. Accessed July 12, 2009.

<sup>371</sup> These business numbers are from IMDb. Available <<http://www.imdb.com/title/tt0468569/business>>. Accessed May 9, 2009.

<sup>372</sup> Thomas Schatz, *Hollywood Genres: Formulas, Filmmaking, and the Studio System* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1981), pp. 6-7.

<sup>373</sup> See Tom O’Regan, “Cultural Exchange,” *A Companion to Film Theory* (1999), ed. Toby Miller and Robert Stam (Malden, MA: Blackwell, 2004), p. 265.

<sup>374</sup> Thomas Schatz, *Hollywood Genres*, p. 7.

<sup>375</sup> “Cinema: Prestige Picture,” *Time* (August 16, 1937). Anonymous article from online archive at <<http://www.time.com/time/magazine/article/0,9171,770806,00.html>>. Accessed May 6, 2009.

<sup>376</sup> See Chris Cagle, “Two Modes of Prestige Film,” *Screen*, vol. 48, no. 3 (August 2007), pp. 291-311.

<sup>377</sup> Baumann, *Hollywood Highbrow*, p. 97; see pp. 92-97. As Baumann puts it, although these expensive prestige “productions did *not* redefine film as art, they *were* a precursor to such a redefinition.” Ibid., p. 96; Baumann’s italics.

<sup>378</sup> See Thomas Schatz, *The Genius of the System* (New York: Pantheon, 1988), p. 491. The directors of the post-classical era have often “put forth a fantasy image of [Hollywood] filmmaking as a field of restricted production, an image that film reviewers and the press participated in constructing”—and an image that in the 1960s and 1970s “matched emerging values and preferences.” Baumann, *Hollywood Highbrow*, p. 88.

<sup>379</sup> On the authenticity of indie-style films, see Michael Newman, “Indie Culture: In Pursuit of the Authentic Autonomous Alternative,” *Cinema Journal*, vol. 48, no. 3 (Spring 2009), pp. 16-34.

<sup>380</sup> Kier-La Janisse, “The Cult of Suffering,” an interview with Pascal Laugier, *Rue Morgue*, vol. 87 (March 2009), p. 19.

<sup>381</sup> See, e.g., John Hess, “*La politique des auteurs*, part two: Truffaut’s manifesto,” *Jump Cut*, no. 2 (July-August 1974), p. 20.

<sup>382</sup> To get a sense of how auteurist and art-oriented even the French directors opposed by the auteur critics really were, look at the interview segment with Clément that is included on Criterion’s *Jeux interdits* DVD (2005)—an interview in which Clément comes off as the ultimate cinephile.

<sup>383</sup> Jennie Yabroff, “Straight Outta Denmark,” *Newsweek* (February 28, 2011), p. 54. See also Suanne Bier, “Searching for a Place ‘In a Better World,’” interview with Larry Rohter, *New York Times* (February 22, 2011), online edition. Available at <<http://carpetbagger.blogs.nytimes.com/2011/02/22/searching-for-a-place-in-a-better-world/?partner=rss&emc=rss>>. Accessed February 22, 2011.

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Mary P. Wood, "Cultural Space as Political Metaphor: the Case of the European 'Quality' Film," unpublished conference paper, 2000. Available at <[http://www.mediasalles.it/crl\\_wood.htm](http://www.mediasalles.it/crl_wood.htm)>. Accessed January 20, 2011.

<sup>385</sup> For an overview of recent events in Iranian cinema, see Azadeh Farahmand, "Disentangling the International Festival Circuit: Genre and Iranian Cinema," *Global Art Cinema: New Theories and Histories*, ed. Rosalind Galt and Karl Schoonover (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010), pp. 268-276.

<sup>386</sup> Ashish Rajadhyaksha, "Hindi Cinema," *The Cinema Book* (1985), ed. Pam Cook (London: British Film Institute, 2007), p. 218. See Geoffrey Nowell-Smith, "Art Cinema," *The Oxford History of World Cinema*, ed. Geoffrey Nowell-Smith (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996), pp. 574-575. See also <<http://www.culturalindia.net/indian-cinema/art-cinema.html>>.

<sup>387</sup> Andrews, *Soft in the Middle: The Contemporary Softcore Feature in its Contexts* (Columbus: Ohio State University Press, 2006), pp. 205-229.

<sup>388</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 218-220.

<sup>389</sup> For example of this subcultural acclaim, Softcore Reviews, a prominent softcore website, has referred to *Word of Mouth* "the *Citizen Kane* of softcore." *Ibid.*, p. 201.

<sup>390</sup> This last point holds true even if we consider "the mainstream" as a film that hews relatively close to the contingent universals favored by human nature, especially its preference for "clarity" in speech, story, and action. See Noël Carroll, *Theorizing the Moving Image* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), p. 80. One would think that it would be "unnatural" to favor a relatively "opaque" art cinema over a cinema that maximizes its accessibility. But we needn't look at the issue this way, for our tendency to demean the mainstream may depend on an equally natural urge: our need for social status, which is often responsible for our participation in those discourses that favor oppositional cinemas. In the end, there is no final reason to favor any type of cinema, just as there is no final reason to dismiss any.

## Part Three

### *Institutions and Distributions*

## Chapter Nine / Re-Integrating Stardom

(. . . *and Technology and Reception and . . .*)

One point that I make across this theory is that the high-art status of art cinema is dependent on consistent myths that are circulated through equally consistent intellectual discourses. By emphasizing the auteurism or anti-commercialism of a given art cinema, these discourses lend that cinema an air of seriousness and disinterest. That said, *many* factors must coalesce before the idea that a cinema qualifies as high art can be accepted and circulated across a (sub)culture. After all, the status of an art world results from what Howard Becker has called the “collective activity” of that world.<sup>391</sup> Though a great deal of this activity is just as crucial to the elevation of a cinema as high art as the high-profile activities that are often foregrounded by cinephiles, much of it gets twisted or forgotten as art cinemas are defended and publicized in the standard intellectual ways. Hence, if we are to convey a more holistic account of art cinema, we should highlight as much of that activity as possible. And we should also account for processes of distortion and omission, which are subtly integral to art cinema’s cultural identity.

These are the tasks of this third section, which looks at contextual issues that have been warped or neglected by high-art discourses. In other words, this portion of the book ranges across a number of significant institutional concerns, from film festivals and film studies to art cinema’s anti-commercial ideology and overall distribution patterns. These are all major issues whose impact on art cinema is plain. But we should also look at less obvious issues whose connections to art cinema have been downplayed or neglected by this category’s institutions and supporters. I devote the current chapter primarily to one

commercial issue, stardom, that may seem particularly out of place in discussions of art cinema. Thus, the second and principal section of this chapter theorizes the realities of art-cinema stardom by deploying the useful concepts of “niche stardom” and “auteur celebrity.” These institutional realities have been distorted or omitted in many traditional accounts of art cinema, which are typically committed to building up art cinema, not to exposing its hierarchical processes or its institutional mechanics. I defend this point of view in my opening section by discussing two other issues, technology and audience reception, that have been subject to many of the processes of distortion and omission that have tended to obscure the role of stardom in art cinema.

### Demystifying Technology and Reception

One reason that we don’t hear much about celebrity in art cinema is that partisans of the category as different as André Bazin and Amos Vogel have pressed the idea that, at some basic level, this sector is not star-oriented, a description that belongs to Hollywood cinema or to popular cinema more generally. This thinking reflects an either-or account of art cinema that makes little sense, given the category’s complexities and overlaps. A similar essentialism exists in the context of technological change. The prospect of such change is exciting, for it has typically promised new tools and new experiences. But this prospect also spreads fear, for innovation has, as a rule, been expensive, and it has often seemed to threaten the technologies that producers, distributors, and audiences have investments in and feel comfortable with. Because of these conflicting impulses, familiar essentialisms have come to the fore on either side of the new-tech divide. Often, people who favor the older technology—like silent cinema, black-and-white cinema, or 35mm theatrically distributed film cinema—have deployed a nostalgic, intrinsic-value argument

that attacks the new technology in terms of its inherent artistic inadequacy. Yet advocates of newer technologies like sound cinema, color cinema, or shot-on-digital cinema have often used similar arguments—just to contrary effect.

In his revisionist study, *Technologies of Seeing* (1996), Brian Winston suggests that both arguments distort the realities of technological change. Indeed, he discredits the idea that such innovation is anything but the product of history. According to Winston, had conditions been just a bit different, the cinema could easily have debuted decades earlier. Or, had conditions been a bit different, 16mm stock could have been the choice of professionals rather than having been devalued through amateur associations in certain sectors, like the film-festival world.<sup>392</sup> Thus, in this view, the values that have enmeshed rival technologies—such as silent cinema as opposed to sound cinema or film production as opposed to video production—are sociohistorical phenomena that reflect economic struggles, not the intrinsic art potential of a new technology. In framing these arguments, Winston depends on two ideas: that technological innovations are deployed as a result of “supervening social necessities” like wars and recessions, and that the effects of these innovations are limited by cultural constraints in a process he calls the “suppression of radical potential.”<sup>393</sup> Thus, in discussing Francis Ford Coppola’s ill-fated experiments with video, he notes that the failure of the film industry to adopt HDTV 1125 as a replacement for 35mm film in the 1980s had little or “nothing to do with its quality or even its failure to solve every last problem” related to image values.<sup>394</sup> The industry’s failure to adopt the high-definition analogue process that had replaced 16mm film on television was instead the result of economics that limited video, suppressing its potential rather than proving its necessity.<sup>395</sup> The new technology was, in a word, constrained.

Of course, the classical film theorists, including Sergei Eisenstein, V.I. Pudovkin, Rudolf Arnheim, Siegfried Kracauer, and Bazin, did not use this form of historicist analysis when promoting one technique or one technology over others. Their theories, though sophisticated and creative, tended to be essentialist and at times overlooked the socioeconomic practicalities of film production and film exhibition. And few theorists of any period, including our own, have grappled with the differing technological necessities mandated by art cinema's proliferating formats and sectors. Critics have instead tended to focus on one kind of art movie at a time, which has reinforced the tendency to promote one kind of art movie in one kind of movie world (e.g., the traditional art film in the theatrical world of film festivals) at the expense of another kind of art movie in another kind of movie world (e.g., the experimental art movie as shown in a microcinema, or a museum-based video-art project, or a direct-to-video art movie exhibited in the home).<sup>396</sup> Though these movies can all qualify as "art movies," their different positions across the cultural hierarchy have culminated in different necessities. With this complexity in view, it feels odd to suggest one technology could represent art cinema's essence. A super-genre entails far too much diversity for this to be possible.

But the classical film theorists, when they argued prescriptively about the nature of cinema, seemed bent on reducing this diversity. The case of Arnheim's criticism of the use of sound in cinema offers a case in point. Arnheim deemed cinema a medium of action and montage, one whose visual grace was corrupted by sound.<sup>397</sup> Bazin countered his argument by claiming that any tactics that added to the essential province of cinema, which he considered realism, were cinematic, yielding true art.<sup>398</sup> This form of argument, which attacked or defended a given technique or a given technology in aesthetic terms,

has been a staple of cinema history. Its use was predicted at the outset of film history by the critical rejection of literary adaptations such as *La dame aux camélias* (1911), which was circulated by the *film d'art* movement. And it returned at many crucial moments thereafter: during the advent of sound, the debates over montage, the debut of color stock, the roll-out of video camerawork, the introduction of digital effects, and the emergence of alternative distribution patterns, such as direct-to-video, direct-to-cable, and direct-to-Internet releasing. But in the end, the theorists who used these arguments were seldom doing what they thought they were doing, for art cinema's "essence" has clearly been a social phenomenon all this time—something that is largely external to technology and to all the stuff of film. What these theorists were doing with these arguments, then, was not describing art cinema so much as *making* art cinema by supplementing the canonical processes that have positioned certain auteurs, cinemas, technologies, techniques, styles, and themes at the top of an array of (sub)cultural hierarchies.

Where the intellectual discourses undergirding art cinema have not distorted the realities of cinema through essentialism, they have often simply ignored those realities in order to maintain its central myths. For example, as we will see, one reason the issue of stardom has been downplayed by mainstream critics and "crossover" scholars is that it does not accord with the common account of this category as a non-commercial, artist-centered alternative to Hollywood. A similar reasoning explains why the importance of the audience has been minimized in this area.<sup>399</sup> When it comes to art cinema, any critical focus on the audience threatens the aestheticist vision of the all-controlling director, a vision whose corollary is the concept of the audience as a blank or "disinterested" slate that willingly subjects its collective viewing self to the control of an auteur through the

medium of the masterpiece—and virtually disappears. This is why the idea of an auteur or an auteur's production company doing audience research, as Harvey Weinstein was known for doing, seems wrong or somehow corrupt. Of course, the neo-Kantian myth does not accord with the messy truths that scholars have learned about audiences—and their minds—over the past decades. After all, as Rosalind Galt and Karl Schoonover argue, art cinema's ideal viewer in the postwar era was actually an "impure spectator," one who was typically expected to be both detached *and* "intellectually engaged and emotionally affected."<sup>400</sup> But despite these irreducible realities, the neo-Kantian myth of disinterest has remained a staple of auteur studies, such that those studies have diverged from inquiries devoted to more openly commercial cinemas such as Hollywood cinema or cult cinema, where audience research is traditional.

Not surprisingly, the myth suits auteurs like Peter Greenaway just fine.<sup>401</sup> Indeed, most directors have happily signed on to a belief system that makes it easier to imagine them as in control of their audience. Occasionally, though, an auteur traipses across the stage who rejects the neo-Kantian point of view. Consider, for example, Andy Warhol.<sup>402</sup> One of the things I most admire about Warhol is the audacity with which he challenged the myth by implying that we didn't need to give avant-garde cinema (or any legitimate art cinema) the disinterested attention that it demanded through its status and its setting. According to Warhol, no matter where we watched his experimental films, we could treat them the way people have always treated porn: as prompts for other activities. Movies like *Sleep* (1963), *Blow Job* (1963), and *Empire* (1964) were made, in Warhol's words, "to help the audience get more acquainted with themselves." Spectators could "do more things" with his movies than regular ones.<sup>403</sup> They could look or walk away; they could

even masturbate if circumstances were conducive. After all, they could hardly go wrong watching movies that depict time as much as they depict any object. How much could they miss by looking away from the Empire State Building, which is on screen for over eight hours in the black-and-white silent film *Empire*?

Yet in some contexts, people *did* just sit and watch Warhol's work, accepting the boredom as a liability of the art-house setting.<sup>404</sup> Fortunately, unlike so many art cinemas, Warhol's films managed the move from art house to porn theater and art gallery to rock concert. As a result, scholars have claimed that Warhol was a pioneer who showed how variable the experience of art cinema could be.<sup>405</sup> In any event, it clearly helped *the viewer* that Warhol's early films eventually moved out of art houses. After all, it really is very difficult for people with human brains and human bodies to remain focused on Warhol's early movies. But once those films have been transferred to art galleries, where audience members can walk in or out at their own pace, the pain of watching them fades. Gallery viewing does not entail the same aesthetic attitude, or "close attention," that is mandated by the art house. But this new way of viewing Warhol's work was hardly improper, for it was in accord with behaviors condoned across the museum world and was even in accord with Warhol's stated intention. In the end, Warhol's seemingly blasé attitude toward his audience suggests that the way that we experience art must suit the practicalities of the viewer, of the work, and of the entire institutional context.

The inescapable implication of all this is that there is no "right" way to view art cinema. There are good defaults, like the close attention that helps us glean as much as possible from cinematic experiences. But we need to be honest and admit that even this default ideal, which falls short of the absurd value traditionally ascribed to neo-Kantian

disinterest, is not always appropriate. It doesn't really suit a rowdy midnight showing of cult art movies. Nor does it always suit the screening of experimental films in theaters—where people are apt to move around so much that these distractions can become one of the markers of the overall experience—or the way that we watch movies in the privacy of our own homes. Indeed, when we watch art movies on our own, we *know* that we may look at them however we choose. Today, aided by DVD extras and home aids,<sup>406</sup> we have more incentive than ever to watch art movies at home in the style that fits our purposes and our circumstances. No matter how we watch, though, there is no guarantee that we will ever take anything durable from our consumption of art movies. Nor is there any guarantee that we won't. I have no memory of many art movies that I first saw under the most optimal conditions, and I have written entire articles about art movies that I first saw at times of personal distress. We watch as we can, remember as we can. No technology or institutional backdrop is essentially superior to any other technology or backdrop. And no viewing posture is automatically superior to any other.

### Niche Stardom and Auteur Stardom

Angela Ndalians once noted that one “of the myths about art cinema is that while Hollywood is primarily concerned with profit and ‘empty’ entertainment, art films are free from commercial constraints and encourage creativity and intellectual engagement with deeper meaning.”<sup>407</sup> As a result, cinephiles in particular have been reluctant to look at art cinema in terms of topics reminiscent of Hollywood, like stardom. We should take a fresh look, then, at art-cinema celebrity in order to understand it through the idea of niche stardom and through the synergistic potentials of auteurism.

Clearly, the concept of the movie star is intertwined with Hollywood. During the classical era, Hollywood stardom was tied to the economies of scale that were generated by vertical integration. In that period, the stars were under contract to the studios, which systematically recruited, developed, and exploited them. But this system began to break down after the Paramount decrees of 1948. In the new system that emerged after 1968, Hollywood stardom was often tied to the economies of scale generated by the global (or “horizontal”) reach of the ultra-high-budget, high-concept movie. Amid the turmoil of the New Hollywood, this stardom was increasingly driven by agents and by the skyrocketing salaries that these agents negotiated for clients. Hollywood studios have used these huge fees to ironic advantage. Since they are one of the few sources of movie financing large enough to pay such steep costs, the studios have been able to use these salaries to block competitors from accessing the most bankable stars. The implication of all this is that movie stardom has been routinely identified with the mass audience that only Hollywood stars, with their broad recognition, seem able to deliver.<sup>408</sup>

Inspired by the impoverishment of Italian neorealism, partisans such as Bazin—as well as festival directors from across the globe—have for sixty years portrayed postwar European art cinemas as ill-equipped to replicate Hollywood celebrity.<sup>409</sup> This partisan discourse has coalesced with the larger presentation of art cinema as an alternative to Hollywood—a commercial strategy that has allowed cinephile promoters like Vogel to present this category of cinema as a “subversive art” free of the influence of agents, stars, and fans.<sup>410</sup> Audiences and critics have often taken their cues from this sort of promotion, trumpeting the idea of art cinema as a star-free zone, a place where a “purer” form of film creation occurs. To this end, they have engaged in many of the processes of essentialist

distortion and simple omission described above in order to bolster art cinema's credibility as an anti-commercial, anti-Hollywood area of film culture.

The trouble with these myths, however, is that they are neither all that nuanced nor all that accurate. Once scholars dispense with them, there is so much to see—for art cinema has always depended on its stars. Even though many people still view art cinema as representing, as Galt and Schoonover have put it, the “rejection of Hollywood systems and values,” scholars have found star systems there that “closely parallel Hollywood's own structures.”<sup>411</sup> Indeed, Jill Forbes and Sarah Street have noted that even the Soviet cinema of the 1920s, which was often exported as an art cinema, had its own celebrities, despite its rhetorical and institutional “rejection of Hollywood's norms and the capitalist associations of star systems.”<sup>412</sup> Over the category's history, some types of art-cinema star have been indistinguishable from Hollywood stars, but others have served as celebrities only within the boundaries of a specific niche or a specific subculture. What is more, art cinema has modified the traditional Hollywood approach to stardom in several respects, adapting new mystifications to old purposes. Thus, the fetishization of the director as a “star auteur” has been central to art cinema's adversarial cult of celebrity, allowing works in this category to harness new synergies of exploitation.

The crux of any movie star is not some mysterious essence but the fact that he or she is a known quantity that an audience will pay to see. The Hollywood star machine has been effective at building star personae, providing attractive figures like Marilyn Monroe and James Dean with coherent yet multiply meaningful mystiques that Richard Dyer has referred to as “*structured polysem[ies]*.”<sup>413</sup> In the classical era, the studios manufactured and maintained these personae themselves; by contrast, over the current period, they have

outsourced much of the work to agents, publicists, and the media. When the work is done well, producers and distributors can make lucrative matches between the known quantity, i.e., the star, and the unknown quantity, i.e., the new star vehicle. In such cases, the new Hollywood star vehicle offers its audience the same thing that the new Hollywood genre vehicle offers: the promise of standardization in difference.<sup>414</sup>

There is no reason to think art cinema is at odds with these basic facts of movie stardom. Indeed, the path of the star in art cinema has at times been indistinguishable from that of the Hollywood star. Consider Brigitte Bardot. According to Peter Lev, the “leading personality in the breakthrough of foreign art films to larger audiences in the United States was not Fellini or Resnais . . . but rather the French actress and sex symbol Brigitte Bardot,” whom Lev refers to as a “female James Dean.”<sup>415</sup> Mark Betz has argued that Bardot’s attraction was a multivalent blend of modern spirit and primitive allure.<sup>416</sup> Bardot’s mystique was exploited by distributors looking to extend the reach of art films like *Et Dieu...créa la femme* (1956) and *Le mépris* (1963). Unsurprisingly, in Hollywood environments that were still limited by the Production Code, Bardot became an almost instant celebrity. As Ginette Vincendeau has put it, “Bardot was launched as *the* female sexual myth of 1950s France, and a valuable export when international markets, especially Hollywood, craved the ‘natural’ sexuality of European actresses.”<sup>417</sup> The success of this art-to-mainstream strategy led to extensive imitation, with many stars of European art cinema, like Elke Sommers, Catherine Deneuve, and Emmanuelle Béart, looking to rekindle the Bardot magic for global markets. This international star power has often been most apparent at film festivals—which, as Liz Czach has recently observed, have increasingly played a double game of emphasizing while also downplaying, trying

to harness the power of a global “star culture” so as to pad their own commercial prestige while not damaging “the status and visibility of the cinephiliac moment,” through which the festival system maintains its difference from Hollywood.<sup>418</sup>

For the most part, though, art cinema has not succeeded in commodifying its stars to the extent that it succeeded with Bardot. Instead, art-cinema stardom has been mostly limited to subcultures, yielding a “niche stardom”—or it has led to success in (relatively) minor mainstreams, as in the case of stars like Marcello Mastroianni and Toshirō Mifune, who also worked with directors of popular genre movies in the European and Asian film industries. Some of the best known stars in art-cinema niches have gained celebrity by working regularly with prestigious auteurs. Thus, Max von Sydow, Setsuko Hara, Jean-Pierre Léaud, and Mastroianni appeared repeatedly in the art films of Ingmar Bergman, Yasujirō Ozu, François Truffaut, and Federico Fellini, respectively, as have many actors in the more contemporary films of Mike Leigh, Hal Hartley, and so on. Participation in regular ensembles binds the star’s celebrity to that of the auteur. Because the traditional art film has been a global format, these actors have had a horizontal reach even though ensemble stardom is typically a form of niche stardom. Promoters and cinephiles have long had “cultish” ways of sustaining this particular form of stardom across time; they have, for example, supported retrospectives devoted to art-cinema stars at film festivals, museum theaters, university theaters, and repertory theaters.

To better understand the concept of niche stardom, it helps to consider Parker Posey, the indie queen whose metro-caffeinated star persona has largely been restricted to the American independent film movement. Posey, who has worked repeatedly with indie directors like Hartley, is the subject of a fine article by Diane Negra in which Negra

speculates that niche stars, “while perhaps not fully meeting criteria of stardom in the conventional sense,” do indeed “generate personae that operate as legible, functional trademarks.”<sup>419</sup> The familiarity of these personae “functions to guarantee that the films in which they appear will support a certain aesthetic and status economy with which independent film-goers are likely to affiliate.”<sup>420</sup> Similar things might be said of actors like Steve Buscemi, Chloë Sevigny, and, more recently, Greta Gerwig, who have also been active mainly in American indie circles. For *Negra*, even cameo appearances by such stars have been sufficient to stamp films with significant indie authenticity. Their participation in a project can convince producers of its profitability and persuade viewers of its generic benefits, including its status-conferring potential.

In art cinema’s illegitimate subcultures, we find a different niche phenomenon. Even in cult niches, the key to stardom is recognizability. But here that recognizability is a mixed blessing that can leave niche stars like Misty Mundae or Jenna Jameson with no room to maneuver. Though niche stardom can furnish stars with subcultural capital, the stronger that capital is, the more likely it is to block their aspirations to cross into more legitimate sectors. It is for this reason that “contract stars” such as Mundae and Jameson have articulated careful aspirations to cross into low-budget horror movies before raising their sights higher.<sup>421</sup> The necessity of this incremental approach was determined by the scope of their success in illegitimate fields. For instance, though she has been a principal member of Tony Marsiglia’s subculturally acclaimed ensembles, Mundae’s wider success in softcore has all but disqualified her from mainstream projects. For now, the best she can hope for is to become a “scream queen.” It is to the point that Sasha Grey’s smaller reputation in hardcore—not to mention her greater training as an actor—helped her win

the lead in a recent and fairly mainstream indie film, Steven Soderbergh's *The Girlfriend Experience* (2009). Though Soderbergh openly exploited Grey's "authenticity," he did not want her reputation in porn to overwhelm his movie.<sup>422</sup>

The most important form of celebrity in art cinema, though, belongs to the auteur, whom we might think of as a star director. That this stardom has been useful to *directors* is obvious. But it has also been useful to audiences, distributors, and actors. For example, as an organizing principle, the star director has often replaced the star actor, which is tantamount to substituting a familiar style for a familiar face. This method of identifying a film confers prestige on its users, for it demonstrates knowledge and taste. But in the end it is just as easy for cinephiles to say "Have you seen the new Fassbinder film?" or "I loved the new Herzog movie" as it is for traditional viewers to say "Have you seen the new Monroe film?" or "I loved the new Stallone movie." Like the actor-based method, this way of identifying a movie indicates that its user has recognized that it contains a star handle that he or she has seen, handled, and would pick up again. This method has been most useful in art cinema, which hasn't always traded in the usual known quantities like global stars or broadly accessible genre conventions. Indeed, as Steve Neale once put it, in art cinema, the name of the auteur often works "as a 'brand name,' a means of labeling and selling a film and of orienting expectation and channeling meaning and pleasure in the absence of generic boundaries and categories."<sup>423</sup>

We can also get a sense of the benefits of this new form of celebrity by focusing on distributors, actors, and audiences. Distributors have benefited from auteur celebrity in that an auteur vehicle offers some of the economic certainty of a traditional star vehicle. Like that vehicle, the auteur work is rooted in a standardization-in-difference paradigm.

But I think distributors have received other benefits as well. Consider the implications of a distinctive director-actor dynamic that could not have manifested outside aspirational movies. In this dynamic, the prestige of the auteur gives the actor a culturally legitimate alibi for allowing the director to use him or (usually) her as a specifically sexual artistic resource. American studios quickly discovered that auteur vehicles could offer them new distribution synergies, particularly if those movies were combined with the name-brand stars that only lavish financing could purchase. This discovery allowed producers and distributors to pressure auteurs like Jean-Luc Godard into exploiting the sexuality of stars like Bardot, and it allowed them to promote films like *Le mépris* (1963) through the same sexuality. The key was the auteur's cultural status, which could be used to defend a film's circulation against charges of exploitation or pornography.

Such a dynamic could be further enhanced if it were supplemented by the addition of accessible genre motifs. This formula allowed Italian auteur Michelangelo Antonioni to gain one of his biggest hits with the Euro-American co-production *Blow-Up* (1966), an art thriller in which Vanessa Redgrave parades without her top in one protracted segment. Later, in the New Hollywood era, cinephiles took a culturally legitimate pleasure from watching A-list stars under the pretext that they were attending not for Hollywood stars or Hollywood genre effects but for New Hollywood auteurs. What made this promising for distributors was the fact that auteur status gave Hollywood stars the free pass to craft the erotic performances that might have otherwise threatened their careers. Thus, in 1974, Julie Andrews was reportedly slated to star in a studio-made hardcore film conceived by Stanley Kubrick, written by Terry Southern, directed by Mike Nichols, and funded by Warner Brothers.<sup>424</sup> Though this film was never made, the situation that it exemplifies has

remained a fixture of art cinema. Over the past few decades, audiences have been able to claim that they were attending a David Lynch film, and *not* a Patricia Arquette erotic thriller; or a Stanley Kubrick film, *not* a Nicole Kidman (or Tom Cruise) erotic thriller; or a Jane Campion film, *not* a Meg Ryan erotic thriller. It is to the point, I think, that only famous auteurs have gotten Arquette, Kidman, and Ryan to display their bodies so fully and so realistically. In auteur works, nudity is often read as personal cinema and not as the kind exploitation in which the director, distributor, actor, and audience are complicit. Here, the auteur's star persona structures that of the actors. This process benefits actors in that it protects their careers from the explicitness of their performances, since everything in an auteur work is, theoretically, sanctioned by the auteur—and it benefits distributors in that it gives them marketing hooks *and* regulatory alibis.

As noted in Chapter Three, the rise of the auteur helped transform cinemas across the globe. Among other things, auteurism led to less timid forms of filmmaking, for the alibis of art and individualism allowed for greater excess. Through these dynamics, art cinema developed into a genre in which the non-standard has been the standard. Thus, because of its almost exaggerated stress on the “concept of the *Autorenfilm*,” the New German Cinema became, according to Neale, “a series of star films by star names, the films themselves almost obliged to contain marks of personal eccentricity.”<sup>425</sup> The most ironic cinema to be transformed by auteur stardom was Hollywood, which strayed from its studio roots in the New Hollywood era. From 1968 to 1980, Hollywood became less studio-centered and less actor-centered as it became increasingly director-centered. What is more, the new celebrity of auteurs like Robert Altman and Arthur Penn led studio heads to pick off bankable foreign and independent directors the same way that they had

always imported diverse talents. According to the *New York Times*, these Hollywood recruitment practices had by 2006 picked the world art cinemas clean, leaving those industries without any “auteur draw” to speak of.<sup>426</sup> These world cinemas have had less time to form directors into star directors, for would-be auteurs have “gone Hollywood” before they could develop into personal filmmakers.

Another fascinating result of Hollywood auteurism has been the evolving stardom of the writer. Writers have, of course, always been stars in Hollywood. The auteur critics attacked their celebrity, but they never supplanted it altogether—particularly since anti-auteur critics often promoted writers, substituting one kind of “author” for another. (See Chapter Three.) With the post-1980 decline of the New Hollywood, certain Hollywood writers, including Hungarian-born Joe Eszterhas, regained some of their old industrial prominence.<sup>427</sup> Over the past decade, this trend has culminated in the burgeoning auteur draw of a writer like Charlie Kaufman, who has merged the celebrity of the director and the actor with that of the writer through the critical and popular success of his extremely verbal, highly intelligent, and still utterly mainstream art movies filled with A-list stars, including *Being John Malkovich* (1999), *Adaptation* (2002), *The Eternal Sunshine of the Spotless Mind* (2004), and *Synecdoche, New York* (2008).

At the other end of the spectrum is the avant-garde, whose auteurist sensibility has been quite substantial but has been difficult to develop and to capitalize on. Experimental cinema and video art rarely include established stars, and at times they contain no actors at all. Thus, their creators often take auteurism to artisan extremes, becoming the only possible stars of their projects. This strategy has had anti-commercial justifications, of course; but it has also meant that experimentalists must commodify themselves just as

stridently as other fine artists. When avant-gardists like Stan Brakhage or Kenneth Anger succeed in this self-promotion and become consecrated art-world stars, they end up with a cultural capital that is useful in certain subcultures such as academia. But this celebrity is exceedingly rare, taking decades for experimental film- and videomakers to develop, during which time they may have few sources of funding.

It is safe to say, then, that art cinema has relied on its stars but in ways that often differ from Hollywood cinemas. Though art-film stars like Jean-Paul Belmondo never had the global appeal of a Humphrey Bogart, the Hollywood star he mimics in Godard's *A bout de souffle* (1960), he still became a name star to a niche audience that was spread across the globe. In this way, he and other celebrities of the genre became "distribution symbols," whose stardom was tantamount to the standardization-in-difference paradigm that benefits genre participants according to industrial roles.

Issues such as stardom, technology, and reception have been marginalized in art-cinema discourse because they demystify the topics that the category's partisans want us to deem absolute: the artists and their works. As scholars have increasingly ignored these subtle and not-so-subtle directives, they have increasingly delved "forbidden" topics and confronted a range of mystifications. I think that the only way forward is to continue this process, which should allow us to see art cinema for what it is: namely, a diverse set of historical realities cloaked by a less diverse set of mythologies that distort those realities in predictable ways, often to uphold this category's prestige and to further its circulation through cultures and subcultures across the globe.

## NOTES TO CHAPTER NINE

Howard Becker, *Art Worlds* (1982; Berkeley: University of California Press, 2008), p. 360.

<sup>392</sup> Brian Winston, *Technologies of Seeing: Photography, Cinematography and Television* (London: British Film Institute, 1996), pp. 60-69, 86.

<sup>393</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 7-9.

<sup>394</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 98.

<sup>395</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 98, 105.

<sup>396</sup> Consider the microcinemas, which are a crucial segment of today's avant-garde world in that they are places where American experimentalists may get screened outside the classroom and outside the marginal slots of festivals primarily devoted to traditional art films. It would be odd to suggest that the microcinemas are devoted to something other than "real" art. Yet they show no bias against 16mm procedures, nor any against digital or video procedures. If they show any bias at all, it is against home viewing—but there is a clear logic for this. Indeed, crucial figures in that movement like the Aurora Picture Show's Andrea Grover foresee a day when digital projection is the norm. Grover is fine with that—though she admits that the economics do not yet make sense for microcinemas. Michael Goldman, "Digitally Independent Cinema," *Filmmaker Magazine: The Magazine of Independent Film* (Winter 2008), pp. 3-4. Available at <<http://www.filmmakermagazine.com/winter2008/projection.php>>, pp. 4-5. Accessed April 13, 2009.

<sup>397</sup> See Rudolf Arnheim, "A New Laocoön: Artistic Composites and the Talking Film" (1938), *Film as Art* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1957), pp. 199-230.

<sup>398</sup> See André Bazin, *What is Cinema?*, Vol. 1 (1958), tran. Hugh Grey (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1967), pp. 23-40.

<sup>399</sup> This has not been the case lately in academia, as new historicist studies focused on exhibition like Barbara Wilinsky's *Sure Seaters: The Emergence of Art House Cinema* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2001) and Haidee Wasson's *Museum Movies: The Museum of Modern Art and the Birth of Art Cinema* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2005) have come to the fore.

<sup>400</sup> Galt and Schoonover, "The Impurity of Art Cinema," *Global Art Cinema: New Theories and Histories*, ed. Rosalind Galt and Karl Schoonover (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010), p. 8. Schoonover presses this argument about the manifold expectations of art cinema's postwar spectators in the context of Italian neorealism's U.S. reception in his terrific article "Neorealism at a Distance," *European Film Theory*, ed. Temenuga Trifonova (New York: Routledge, 2008), pp. 301-318.

<sup>401</sup> Greenaway's neo-Kantian vision of an auteur controlling a detached audience is signaled in interviews when he compares unfavorably the emotional displays tolerated among cinema audiences to the greater disinterest demanded of museum audiences. "'When you go to the National Gallery,'" Greenaway has said, "'you don't stand in front of the painting and emote. You don't cry, you don't shout, you don't scream. Why should we demand those sets of relationships in the cinema?'" Quoted in Alan Woods, *Being Naked Playing Dead: The Art of Peter Greenaway* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1996), pp. 81-82. See also Suzanna Turman, "Peter Greenaway" (1992), *Peter Greenaway: Interviews*, ed. Vernon Gras and Marguerite Gras (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 2000), p. 151.

<sup>402</sup>

Many art-film auteurs have rejected the neo-Kantian attitude toward the audience as well. For example, one-time Dogme director Susanne Bier recently stated disapprovingly that "European filmmakers still think that movie making is about them expressing themselves, and not about communicating to an audience." Susanne Bier, "Searching for a Place 'In a Better World'," interview with Larry Rohter, *New York Times* (Feb. 22, 2011): online edition. Available at <<http://carpetbagger.blogs.nytimes.com/2011/02/22/searching-for-a-place-in-a-better-world/?partner=rss&emc=rss>>. Accessed February 22, 2011.

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Quoted in Ara Osterweil, "Andy Warhol's *Blow Job*: Toward the Recognition of a Pornographic Avant-garde," *Porn Studies*, ed. Linda Williams (Durham: Duke University Press, 2004), p. 450.

<sup>404</sup> Joan Hawkins, *Cutting Edge: Art-Horror and the Horrific Avant-garde* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2000), p. 178. Audiences who expected a different experience sometimes reacted violently. See Ara Osterweil, "Andy Warhol's *Blow Job*," pp. 449-451.

<sup>405</sup> On Warhol, see A.L. Rees, "Movements in Art 1941-79," *Film and Video Art*, ed. Stuart Comer (London: Tate, 2009), pp. 55-58, and especially Christopher Eamon, "An Art of Temporality," *Film and Video Art*, ed. Stuart Comer (London: Tate, 2009), pp. 76-79.

<sup>406</sup> See, e.g., Alison Trope, "Footstool Film School: Home Entertainment as Home Education," *Inventing Film Studies*, ed. Lee Grieveson and Haidee Wasson (Durham: Duke University Press, 2008), pp. 353-373.

<sup>407</sup> Angela Ndalanian, "Art Cinema," *The Cinema Book*, ed. Pam Cook (1985; London: British Film Institute, 2007)h, p. 84.

<sup>408</sup> For coverage of contemporary Hollywood, see Steve Neale and Murray Smith, ed., *Contemporary Hollywood Cinema* (London: Routledge, 1998).

<sup>409</sup> See, e.g., André Bazin, *What is Cinema?*, vol. 2, tran. Hugh Gray (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1971), pp. 22-25.

<sup>410</sup>

See, e.g., Amos Vogel, *Film as a Subversive Art* (New York: Random House, 1976), pp. 83-84, 108-110.

<sup>411</sup>

Rosalind Galt and Karl Schoonover, "Introduction: The Impurity of Art Cinema," p. 7.

<sup>412</sup> Jill Forbes and Sarah Street, *European Cinema: An Introduction* (New York: Palgrave, 2000), p. 47; see pp. xii, 45-48 for the presence of star systems in European cinemas that were opposed, at least rhetorically, to Hollywood norms, including the use of celebrities.

<sup>413</sup> Richard Dyer, *Stars* (1979; London: British Film Institute, 1998), p. 63. Dyer's italics.

<sup>414</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 11; see pp. 10-12.

<sup>415</sup> Peter Lev, *The Euro-American Cinema* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1993), p. 13.

<sup>416</sup> Mark Betz, *Beyond the Subtitle: Remapping European Art Cinema* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2009), pp. 121-131. See also Tino Balio, "Brigitte Bardot and Hollywood's Takeover of the U.S. Art Film Market in the 1960s," *Trading Culture: Global Traffic and Local Cultures in Film and Television*, ed. Sylvia Harvey (Eastleigh, UK: John Libbey, 2006), pp. 191-201, and Dyer, *Stars*, pp. 70-73.

<sup>417</sup> Ginette Vincendeau, "Brigitte Bardot," *The Oxford History of World Cinema*, ed. Geoffrey Nowell-Smith (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996), p. 492. Vincendeau's italics. See also Jack Stevenson, "And God Created Europe: How the European Sexual Myth Was Created and Sold to Post-War American Movie Audiences," *Fleshpot: Cinema's Sexual Myth Makers and Taboo Breakers*, ed. Jack Stevenson (Manchester: Critical Vision, 2002), p. 35, and Dominique Rusell, "Introduction: Why Rape?," *Rape in Art Cinema*, ed. Dominique Russell (New York: Continuum, 2010), p. 5.

<sup>418</sup> Liz Czach, "Cinephilia, Stars, and Film Festivals," *Cinema Journal* 49.2 (Winter 2010), p. 145. One way that art cinema's difference from mainstream cinema is maintained in many (though hardly all) traditional art films is through its facial expressions. For example, one recognizable tradition that helps viewers identify an art film as "non-mainstream" involves the use of exaggerated detachment, especially in the faces female characters. Indeed, though art cinema has promised us an inquiry into female ecstasy since at least 1933, when Gustav Machatý tightened on Hedy Lamarr in *Ecstasy*, the Czech art film, it has regularly given us signs of female detachment instead. Hence, this movie category has frequently been embodied through the "inexpressive expressivity" of its signature actresses, from Bardot, Deneuve, and Béart to Jean Moreau, Vanessa Redgrave, Monica Vitti, Liv Ullmann, Charlotte Rampling, Faye Dunaway, Delphine Seyrig, Tilda Swinton, Isabelle Huppert, Juliette Binoche, and Gong Li.

<sup>419</sup> Diane Negra, "'Queen of the Indies': Parker Posey's Niche Stardom and the Taste Cultures of Independent Film," *Contemporary American Independent Film*, ed. Chris Holmlund and Justin Wyatt (London: Routledge, 2005), p. 71.

<sup>420</sup> Ibid.

<sup>421</sup> See David Andrews, *Soft in the Middle: The Contemporary Softcore Feature in its Contexts* (Columbus: Ohio State University Press, 2006), pp. 194, 240-243. On Jenna Jameson, see Kevin Carr, "Exclusive: Jenna Jameson to Produce Horror Movies," *Film School Rejects* (April 28, 2008), p. 1. Posted at <<http://www.filmschoolrejects.com/news/exclusive-jenna-jameson-to-produce-horror-movies.php>>. Accessed May 31, 2009.

<sup>422</sup>

Chris Lee, "Porn Star Sasha Grey Gets Mainstream Role," *Los Angeles Times* (May 21, 2009), p. 1. Posted at <<http://www.latimes.com/entertainment/news/la-et-sasha-grey21-2009may21,0,7751766.story>>. Accessed May 31, 2009.

<sup>423</sup> Steve Neale, "Art Cinema as Institution," *Screen* 22.1 (Spring 1981), p. 36.

<sup>424</sup> For an authoritative account of this "almost" movie, see Jon Lewis, "Real Sex: Aesthetics and Economics of Art-House Porn," *Jump Cut*, no. 51 (Spring 2009), pp. 1-2. Available at <<http://www.ejumpcut.org/currentissue/LewisRealsex/text.html>>. Accessed June 21, 2009.

<sup>425</sup> Neale, "Art Cinema as Institution," p. 24.

<sup>426</sup> Anthony Kaufman, "Is Foreign Film the New Endangered Species?," *The New York Times* (January 22, 2006), p. 2. Available at <<http://www.nytimes.com/2006/01/22/movies/22kauf.html>>. Accessed April 17, 2006.

<sup>427</sup> On Joe Eszterhas, see Linda Ruth Williams, "Written by Joe Eszterhas," *The Erotic Thriller in Contemporary Cinema* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2005), pp. 149-163.

## Chapter Ten / Art Cinema as Institution, Redux

### *Art Houses, Film Festivals, and Film Studies*

In a recent issue of *Scope*, Eleftheria Thanouli observes that, thirty years on, the two most influential articles on art cinema remain David Bordwell's "The Art Cinema as a Mode of Film Practice" (1979) and Steve Neale's "Art Cinema as Institution" (1981). Thanouli then critiques Bordwell's "canonical account" of art cinema—which, as she notes, he expanded in *Narration in the Fiction Film* (1985)—"to underline a number of weaknesses that undermine the applicability of art cinema as a cohesive paradigm of narration."<sup>428</sup> In the course of her essay, Thanouli argues that Bordwell's account of this category is incompatible with recent trends, including the appearance of American "smart films," Danish Dogme films, and second-wave Iranian art films—to the point that she wonders why we would want to use a concept that has been "so diluted over the years

that it can contain practically everything.”<sup>429</sup> Nevertheless, she continues to press for better terminology, even if our search for formal precision convinces us “to abandon the idea of ‘art cinema’ as a grand narrative paradigm once and for all.”<sup>430</sup>

This is an effective essay, but we should reinforce its premises so as to embrace its conclusions in a more institutional way. First, it is imperative to see that Thanouli is questioning “art cinema” as a *narrative* category and not as a generic or institutional one. This might be hard to discern if we are mostly familiar with Neale, for he and Bordwell treat art cinema differently. Neale looks at the category as a diffuse industrial institution, while Bordwell treats it as a historically specific set of narrative forms arising from a circumscribed set of European attitudes, movies, and directors.<sup>431</sup> So when she dismantles Bordwell’s account by showing how varied art cinema has been as a narrative form, she does not prove that we should dispense with this term as a generic concept. All that she verifies is that we should stop thinking that it still makes sense in the narrative terms put forth by Bordwell. On this, I fully agree with Thanouli. “Art cinema” makes little sense as a term that implies static or even *coherent* narrative forms.

Indeed, Thanouli comes close to saying that Bordwell’s analysis—which places certain works by Robert Bresson and Jean-Luc Godard outside the art-cinema category while placing those of Ingmar Bergman and Michelangelo Antonioni squarely inside it—was never sensible.<sup>432, 433</sup> I wish that she had said it. For it makes no sense to me to define art cinema, whose cultural and institutional status has been so universally sought, as a tightly restricted subset of an already rigid set of narrative films. This point is only magnified, I think, when we consider how Bordwell reduces the scope of “art cinema” from the outset of his account. Not only does he distinguish what he considers an

authentic art cinema from the many art cinemas referred to as such before the Second World War, but he also distinguishes it from all the post-classical art cinemas that do not match the new-wave phenomena that he prefers.<sup>434</sup> By contrast, in “Art Cinema as Institution,” Neale refuses to make exclusionary distinctions of this sort. He accepts all historical art cinemas as “art cinema,” for he hopes to grasp the logic of art cinema’s institutional eclecticism, which Rosalind Galt and Karl Schoonover refer to as its “mongrel identity.”<sup>435</sup> So he immediately confronts the fact that art cinema has entailed a diversity of forms that already included everything from Jean Cocteau and the French avant-garde of the 1920s and 1930s to Francis Ford Coppola and the New Hollywood of the 1960s and 1970s. He does not pretend that art cinema could be equated with one narrative idea. Could one idea cover the films of Marcel Duchamp, Werner Herzog, Marie Menken, Robert Altman, Chantal Akerman, Radley Metzger, Nagisa Oshima, and Dario Argento?

This implies that Thanouli’s closing point—that the “crisis of ‘art cinema’ as a coherent mode of narration in contemporary cinema is at least partly due to the inherent deficiencies of this paradigm and partly to the transformations of the entire cinematic terrain over the past two decades”—is imprecise.<sup>436</sup> Though neither Thanouli nor anyone else has really focused on the principal source of art cinema’s diversification over recent decades (i.e., the emergence of the cult-art cinemas), she is still mistaken to suggest that the problem is even *partly* the fault of contemporary cinema. Given that the potential for formal diversity has always been present in the art-cinema concept, the blame for this “crisis” rests entirely with theorists intent on squeezing diverse forms into exceedingly narrow categories. But abandoning this mistake would not mean poetics would have to

abandon their analyses of art cinema, for Thanouli has herself advocated a method that maps narrative properties in a “bottom-up manner.”<sup>437</sup> Nor would they have to dispense with art cinema as a generic (or *super-generic*) institution. Attempting to dispense with this concept would be futile, for art cinema is an active cinematic category that is not going to go away just because we scholars have a hard time figuring out what each new manifestation of “art cinema” means at the formal level. As Thanouli knows, art cinema is a dynamic, global category that theorists must come to grips with somehow. But they cannot do so through a unified theory of art-cinema narrative.

This critique of Bordwell’s method should instead prompt scholars to embrace Neale’s more supple institutional approach, which Thanouli introduces but then looks at only in passing. Indeed, her essay leaves us with a question mark: why did she focus on Bordwell while all but neglecting Neale? Her choice might have made sense had she used her article in the manner that Morris Weitz once used “The Role of Theory in Aesthetics” (1956): as a way of showing that the diversity of forms referred to as “art” make a hash out of the evaluative, formalist logics that try to explain *all* art in terms of *some* art. Such an approach would have been an elegant way to lead back to Neale, since it was Weitz’s innovations that led George Dickie to construct the institutional theory that he finished in *The Art Circle* (1984). But Thanouli hasn’t done this. She seems fully invested in solving Bordwell’s problems within the terms of his project.

But if we are not restricted by this sort of disciplinary investment, we may take Thanouli’s advice and subject Neale’s essay to careful scrutiny. This effort reveals that the assumptions of “Art Cinema as Institution” still have relevance to contemporary art cinema, despite “enormous changes” that have reshaped this category since the 1980s.<sup>438</sup>

After we have accomplished this, we will be in position to update Neale by joining his early institutional account to later ones. The later accounts, some of which are still just emerging, cover art-cinema institutions that Neale surveys only in brief, like the art-house circuit, the festival circuit, and the academic discipline of film studies. These art-cinema institutions have, it appears, anchored our notions of the category in flexible but stable evaluative paradigms like “the festival film” and auteurism.

### Thinking Institutionally

Before turning to Neale, we should consider the term “institution.” When theorists like Neale, Dickie, or Andrew Tudor refer to an “institution,” what they mean is a social construct collectively created and maintained over time. Such a construct can be broad and diffuse, like film studies, or it can be compact and concrete, like *Cahiers du cinéma*, but it is in any case mediated by our group nature, not by our individual or our biological natures. Thus, “institution” is often contrasted with “form” such that fields that promote the idea of intrinsic properties and the study of single texts seem to oppose institutionally minded fields like film history, cultural studies, and sociology.

Both Neale and Bordwell begin their respective pieces with an assumption that qualifies as “institutional”: that art cinema gained traction as a category through Europe’s opposition to Hollywood’s domination of its film markets.<sup>439</sup> But whereas Bordwell uses this idea as a reason to return to a conventional idea of form—and to the belief that art-cinema narrative *must* oppose that of Hollywood—Neale remains focused on institutional specifics, like the efforts of “European countries both to counter American domination of their indigenous markets in film and also to foster a film industry and a film culture of their own.”<sup>440</sup> As a result, Neale manages to look at postwar European art cinema as an

important instance of art cinema but *not* as the only one. And this makes it plausible for him to subsequently present the post-Code, New Hollywood tradition as embracing *some* European attitudes and forms without having to present it as embracing every practice associated with European art cinema simply to justify it *as* an art cinema. In this way, Neale remains open to art cinema's historical diversity.<sup>441</sup>

Though Neale often refers to the distribution and exhibition of postwar European art cinema, he is strongest in reference to its production. According to Neale, this strain of art cinema came to seem "European" through the contributions of major European powers to its production in the postwar era. Specifically, he looks at art cinema's postwar development in France, Germany, and Italy. In each case, his "point of historical and theoretical departure [is] the fact of Hollywood's increasing domination of the mass market in these countries after the First World War."<sup>442</sup> Neale predicates each case on the idea that the advent of sound technology contributed to the early industrial hegemony of Hollywood. Producers in these nations, aided by government subsidies, in effect ceded their mainstream "mass" markets to Hollywood, opting to compete through a niche "art" strategy that supplied cultural prestige, national identity, and global distribution but never the most profits. This class-based strategy became more unified in the decades following the Second World War, when foreign producers were handed distribution advantages in the U.S. market, beginning with the Paramount decrees.

To make my next section more concrete, it helps to summarize what Neale says about the government policies that helped art cinema grow in these European nations. As András Bálint Kovács has noted, "it was already apparent—in the early 1930s—that the semicommercial narrative art-film institution could not survive without state support."<sup>443</sup>

Thus, as Neale indicates, the postwar art cinemas of France, Germany, and Italy got their starts through national strategies designed to protect domestic industries and to reinforce a sense of native cultural identity, which seemed threatened by imports from Hollywood and elsewhere. In France, a centralized system of quotas, tax incentives, and prizes for artistic and cultural merit was established through the formation of the Centre National du Cinéma Française in 1946, the passage of the Loi de Développement de l'Industrie Cinématographique in 1953, and the interventions of the Assemblée Nationale and Minister of Cultural Affairs in 1958 and 1959, respectively.<sup>444</sup> Having subsidized its own silent-era cinema, Germany returned to these policies fairly late, establishing production incentives in the 1950s, with a full system emerging after the 1962 Oberhausen Manifesto through “the setting up of the Kuratorium junger deutsche film in 1965, the Film Subsidy Bill of 1967, and the various interlocking systems of grants, subsidies, and prizes since then, each feeding into the establishment of the ‘New German Cinema’.”<sup>445</sup> Other systems were established in Italy through the Andreotti Law of 1949 and the Aid Law of 1965, which taxed imports and gave awards for merit.<sup>446</sup> These systems also offered incentives to distributors and exhibitors. In France, a policy of “tax concessions” encouraged what Neale refers to as the “development of a numerically powerful Art house circuit” that grew out of the *ciné-clubs* and *cinemas d’art et d’essai*.<sup>447</sup>

Still, according to Neale, it was only through art cinema’s international dimension that it became truly influential. This dimension, which clashed with the nationalism that had underwritten postwar art cinema, reconciled the category’s contradictions through the universals of art, status, and culture.<sup>448</sup> This new internationalism relied on the equally global dimensions of the art concept, which had traditionally submerged a tremendous

amount of heterogeneity, both political and artistic, under the universals of “authorship” and “aesthetic value.” The first signs of this increasing internationalism were evident in the co-production agreements that emerged in this period, such as the one signed between France and Italy in 1949, as well as in “international film festivals, where international distribution [was] sought for these films, and where their status as ‘Art’ [was] confirmed and re-stated through the existence of prizes and awards, themselves neatly balancing the criteria of artistic merit and commercial potential.”<sup>449</sup> By having their credentials certified nationally and internationally, highly sexualized European art films could later become viable in the crucial American market. It is no accident that *Roma, città aperta* (1945), a film that encouraged the growth of the American art-house circuit by causing a stir there on its U.S. release, won a Grand Prix at Cannes in 1946.

Neale does not, then, neglect form. He focuses on just a few narrative and stylistic features that run across art cinema, such as sexualization, psychological realism, and the difference that art cinema maintains between itself and the dominant forms of Hollywood narrative, but he does address quite directly the profound degree of heterogeneity that has traditionally been submerged under the term “art cinema.” In so doing, he shows how this classifier managed to contain art cinema’s expanding formal heterogeneity over its long history. These explanations clarify why this heterogeneity persists today. And they are even more helpful if we update Neale’s account, so that it touches directly on more recent decades. In this way, we may see how institutions in the areas of distribution, exhibition, and evaluation have encouraged the production of diverse art-cinema forms while also encouraging the use of a single concept to cover all of them.

As noted, one necessary limitation of Neale's account is that its main focus is the production end of European art cinema. Thus, Neale leaves out major developments in European art-cinema exhibition and reception, including those in the festival network; he also leaves out most developments in North America and Asia. Still, Neale does cite the impact of Hollywood, which helps to explain how the Production Code came to influence Hollywood's postwar competitors: through the Production Code, European producers and distributors learned all the things that Hollywood could *not* do, meaning that they learned many of the *same* things that they *should* do. The counter-Code approach helped art-cinema producers and distributors bind their films into what seemed to American eyes a genre despite its diversity: "the foreign film." This result was in part the byproduct of a process designed to enhance the appeal of these films in the U.S., which was the crucial world market due to its huge collective audience and its outsize impact on the films Hollywood exported to the world. From 1948 to 1968, this market opened up to foreign films, giving power to a lucrative art-house circuit—and playing a role in Hollywood's flirtations with art cinema and its eventual scuttling of the Code.

Here a few words about American art houses are in order. Until the middle of the twentieth century, viewing art films in the U.S. meant attending one of the little cinemas, repertory theaters, museum theaters, university theaters, or film societies available to cinephiles mainly in college towns and urban areas. But after the Supreme Court's 1948 Paramount decision and its 1952 Miracle decision, these outlets became more prolific, profitable, and organized.<sup>450</sup> Indeed, after those signal events, the art-house circuit rapidly developed into a more regular network with complex relations to other "alternative" sites of exhibition, like the grindhouses and drive-ins of the exploitation circuit.<sup>451</sup> This circuit

tolerated a great deal of formal diversity, exhibiting a range of foreign art films as well as exploitation movies by foreign and domestic producers. As in the U.K.,<sup>452</sup> the U.S. art-house circuit entered a period of decline in the late 1960s that lasted into the 1980s. It was adversely affected by competition with the New Hollywood art movies and high-concept blockbusters that played in Hollywood's standard outlets. This circuit was also affected by suburbanization and the proliferation of multiplexes; later, it even suffered the coming of home video. Despite these setbacks, the American art house survived the 1980s to thrive in the 1990s after the resurgence of American independent film, which encouraged the establishment of new art houses, multi-screen art-plexes, and even a range of microcinemas. Indeed, if American critics still use terms like "art-house style" and "art-house film" in their reviews today, it is because this circuit has been a flexible and resilient host, not because it has actually made movies.

But there is one component of art cinema's exhibition apparatus that *has* had a generative role in art cinema: the global festival network that began at Venice, Cannes, and Berlin and that is still anchored by those institutions as well as by newcomers like Sundance. Of course, the art-house circuit and the festival circuit have shared many roles. As Neale notes, both were devoted to the reverential exhibition of art films, so both reinforced the cinephile's neo-Kantian sense that such films *deserved* or *mandated* their accolades. Through their evaluative functions, these two networks have helped bind art cinema into a category that has been more unified by its institutional claims to high-art status than by its formal attributes, which are as diverse as those of any form of high art. What gives the festival network an edge over the art-house circuit in cultural significance is that, as "the major clearinghouse for art cinema," it has been in a position to dictate

which art movies have gotten distributed to art houses across the globe—and scholars like Thomas Elsaesser, Azadeh Farahmand, and Mark Betz have shown that the festival system has sometimes had a direct creative role by way of the constraints and incentives through which it enmeshes directors, whom it has traditionally, albeit ironically, referred to as “autonomous” auteurs. Because the significance of this system within art cinema cannot be overstated, we should look at it as a primary mechanism through which art cinema has sustained the ideas of value that have bound it together. These ideas include auteur mythology and the notion of “the festival film.”

But we may also choose to look at one other segment of postwar reception and evaluation, the academic discipline of film studies. Film studies is noteworthy because, “as with film festivals, academic study bestows artistic worth on its object,” as Shyon Baumann puts it.<sup>453</sup> Film studies has for the most part been a postwar phenomenon (albeit one that has undergone dramatic changes since Neale wrote “Art Cinema as Institution”). Indeed, its institutionalization in the Anglo-American academy is loosely correlated with the mid-century consecration of the cinema as high art, which justified the medium’s role in academia. This is notable because, if my analysis is right, film studies has played a significant, albeit underreported, role in sustaining art cinema as a concept. Though film scholars have at times been hostile to auteurism and art cinema itself,<sup>454</sup> their participation in the “crossover” forums, which reinforce art cinema’s auteurist assumptions, has been crucial to the long-term maintenance of its institutional values.

### The Film Festival as Contemporary Institution

Before we examine the film-festival system as a contemporary institution of some significance, we should look at its history. This system, which began in Venice in 1932,

is rooted in Europe. As Elsaesser has noted, the film festival is

a very European institution. It was invented in Europe just before the Second World War, but it came to cultural fruition, economic stature, and political maturity in the 1940s and 1950s. Since then, the names of Venice, Cannes, Berlin, Rotterdam, Locarno, Karlovy Vary, Oberhausen and San Sebastian have spelled the roll call of regular watering holes for the world's film lovers, critics and journalists, as well as being the marketplaces for producers, directors, distributors, television acquisition heads, and studio bosses.<sup>455</sup>

Still, as both Neale and Elsaesser have noted, this institution was not confined to Europe for long. As a distribution network, it has performed its commercial role by reproducing its through export. Once the circuit gained glamour through its two undisputed capitals, Venice and Cannes, it spread to North and South America, Asia, Australia, and Africa. Today, there are over 700 festivals globally.<sup>456</sup> The system has traveled everywhere but Antarctica, carrying its cinephilic values along with it.

Consider the U.S. Though the festival system is European in origins and bearings, the first U.S. festival was held in 1953. The circuit spread to major American cities in 1957, when the San Francisco Film Festival was held. After that, the American festival system grew explosively, with seventy-three festivals already active in 1985, many of which were juried, and most of which judged their entries using auteur assumptions.<sup>457</sup> The juried festivals included the U.S. Film Festival, which was renamed the Sundance Film Festival in 1985. The expansion of the American festival circuit has been steady since then, with important festivals taking root in major cities as well as smaller ones like Austin. Today, some cities have multiple festivals and even multiple *major* festivals; New York, e.g., features the New York Film Festival and Tribeca. Many festivals have a sprawling, catholic sensibility while others (such as Ann Arbor, which concentrates on experimental cinema) have specialized tastes. Specialized festivals may be devoted to a genre, theme, or style or to an identity or subculture that cuts across the lines of gender,

class, race, and sexual orientation; thus, festivals for gay-and-lesbian directors form a dynamic segment of today's American scene. Another notable segment is the cult festival that focuses on the "paracinema" aesthetic, i.e., on an alternative taste regime that often presents itself as a cult variation on the art-house sensibility.

Like the art-house circuit, the festival circuit is a loose, decentralized system with a variety of extensions.<sup>458</sup> But it grows tighter and more institutionalized as cinephiles and insiders move from its outer reaches to the inner reaches of the international "A" festivals at Venice, Cannes, and Berlin as well as Toronto, Tokyo, Pusan, etc. These festivals form a compact "network with nodes and nerve endings" through imitation and competition.<sup>459</sup> Elsaesser observes that elite "host cities compete with each other regarding attractiveness of the location, convenience for international access and exclusivity of the films they are able to present. The festivals also compete over desirable dates on the annual calendar."<sup>460</sup> This competition has raised standards across the network, adding

value to the films presented. Competition invites comparison, with the result that festivals resemble each other more and more in their internal organization, while seeking to differentiate themselves in their external self-presentation and the premium they place on their (themed) programming.<sup>461</sup>

A festival offers a stamp of prestige and raises tourist revenues. But what intrigues me most is how its cultural capital flows among producers, distributors, critics, films, and genres through a self-sustaining, circular logic of association. Everything is so colored by the festival hothouse that the sources of value and the objects of reverence consort and merge. This cultural capital has highly practical uses. As Baumann has noted, postwar critics could refer to "the awards that a film had won as testimony to its artistic worth,"<sup>462</sup> and sales agents and distributors could follow suit. To justify this evaluative atmosphere, festivals have had to speak the language of the absolute, the unquestionable. Thus, they

have from the start adopted an air of bogus religiosity that makes their film judgments seem “impervious to rational criteria or secondary elaborations”—for as Farahmand notes, “festival awards would not be useful for distributors if the public were aware of the capital-dependent and politics-driven dynamics of film festivals that . . . influence the selection of films and allocation of awards.”<sup>463, 464</sup> This protective religiosity is not new, for André Bazin had noticed this festival dynamic by 1955, when he made it one premise of his essay, “The Festival Viewed as a Religious Order.”<sup>465</sup>

If a festival is especially durable or successful, it may even provide its prestige to entries that win nothing, for just getting into a festival can be competitive and costly—and potentially useful to distributors. Thus, Marijke de Valck argues in *Film Festivals* (2008) that the value “added by festival selection and programming reaches beyond the level of personal preference and becomes more or less—according to the festival’s prestige on the international film circuit—globally acknowledged as evidence of quality.”<sup>466</sup> Much like a festival award, this participation-based prestige may be invoked by sales agents during or after a festival to market a film to distributors, exhibitors, and audiences, including viewers who watch on computers, cell phones, and I pads. Festivals act as “the turnstiles taking directors into the industry,” useful as high-pressure sites for deal-making between sales agents and distributors.<sup>467</sup> Festivals have, then, been used by exhibitors as guides for programming art houses, art-plexes, microcinemas, and even museums, and they have been used similarly by executives at Blockbuster, Facets, and even Netflix. The festival is, then, art cinema’s central institution, the one that best captures the naked contradictions of a commercial area whose marketability is structured by aesthetic rituals that testify to its anti-commercial purity.

This sort of contradiction is also important to Elsaesser's comments about how, in its effects on production and distribution, the festival has come to resemble Hollywood.<sup>468</sup> Elsaesser's argument in this section of his fine essay "Film Festival Networks" (2005) is based on what he considers a crucial shift that took place in 1972 when Cannes supported the move away from national selection committees. Because any shift at Cannes tended to reverberate across the entire system, this change in effect gave festival directors across the globe the final say over the entry process. Thus it marked a fairly significant moment in the development of what Elsaesser calls an increasingly "postnational" festival system. As Elsaesser has recntedou, "the gold standard of the European festivals under the rule of Cannes [after 1972] became the auteur director," not the nation or the national cinema.<sup>469</sup> By stressing "the auteur" and other signs of universalism, festivals could better facilitate the international flow of cultural and economic capital on which they depended. But as Elsaesser has also pointed out, the increasing auteurism of this postnational system has also been in fairly open conflict with industrial realities.

For example, though festivals promote the autonomous auteur, film directors face a variety of constraints when taking films to festivals. These constraints tend to reinforce formulae approved by festival directors. "[F]ilms are now to some extent 'commissioned' for festivals," Elsaesser notes, meaning that the "power/control has shifted from the film director to the festival director," who is put in the position of a "star curator" or a studio executive.<sup>470</sup> Consequently, many of the Iranian films that Thanouli mentions are festival films,<sup>471</sup> for directors like Mohsen Makmalbaf and Abbas Kiarostami have tailored their films to festival criteria so as to win reliable acclaim.<sup>472</sup> On the other hand, the fact that these auteurs have faced specific subcultural constraints does not mean "the festival film"

is a very restrictive category; indeed, it has as much leeway as the “art cinema” category. Festivals do not have to adhere to centralized criteria, so their dispersal through time and space, in tandem with the incentives that festival directors have to offer new choices and to discover new auteurs, new waves, and national cinemas, has encouraged a great deal of formal heterogeneity. (Here it is to the point that the other hard cases that Thanouli cites, including American smart films and Danish Dogme films, have been identified with film festivals.<sup>473</sup>) As Farahmand makes clear, the fact that art cinema’s “generic boundaries remain loosely defined . . . ensures that festivals can continue to offer fresh products, or at least a new take on the products they showcase.”<sup>474</sup>

One last point should be made about the festival system. Though this system is for the most part an agent of conservatism, it may also be an agent of political and aesthetic change. For Elsasesser, the existence of gay-and-lesbian festivals, which are as value-oriented as any other kind of film festival, has said many positive things about same-sex identities; similarly, the fact that an apolitical site like Cannes awarded *Fahrenheit 9/11* (2004) the Golden Palm said negative things about American foreign policy in the Bush years.<sup>475</sup> Another way that festivals have provoked change is by acting as a register for the changing tastes of juries, audiences, and auteurs. I have noted the existence of cult-movie festivals, which have appeared in Europe (cf., the Brussels International Fantastic Film Festival), North America (with significant events in San Francisco, Austin, and Montreal, among other cities), and several other continents. These festivals may seem to form a separate system with their own rituals and audiences. But this separateness is not unique to cult festivals, given that festivals devoted to experimental cinema and gay-and-lesbian cinema also display this separate-yet-connected nature. There are, then, ways for

movies to flow across these systems into the most culturally prestigious circuit anchored by Cannes, Venice, Berlin, Toronto, and Rotterdam, among others. Moreover, festivals like Tribeca have often included screenings dedicated to films classified as having a cult flavor.<sup>476</sup> These cult areas are crucial to the festival circuit's overall diversity and even more crucial to the flow of cult movies across the globe, a circulation that has been more difficult to ensure than that of more traditional art films.

Thus, in an age in which a fanboy like Quentin Tarantino has become a fixture at Cannes, it may be a harbinger of things to come that the last decade has increasingly seen cult motifs and cult ideas penetrate the most prestigious levels of the circuit. For example, art-horror movies such as Park Chan-wook's *Oldboy* (2003) and Tomas Alfredson's *Let the Right One In* (2008) have won prizes at both traditional festivals and "fantastic" festivals, with *Oldboy* winning a Grand Prix Second Prize at Cannes. This should not surprise us. If art cinema and its auteurist emphasis proved useful to Hollywood directors and to studios in mainstream areas, there is no reason to think they couldn't prove useful to directors with cult sensibilities specializing in cult forms and themes. Here Cannes has been in the vanguard, as shown in the July 2009 issue of *Sight & Sound*. The points of crossover between cult forms and traditional forms have demonstrated that cultural tastes evolve over time. Of course, it is traditional for mainstream critics and traditional cinephiles to see in this process of transformation the "erosion of a certain *idea* about art cinema," as Joan Hawkins puts it, for these observers often still believe that art cinema is "superior to and distinct from exploitation."<sup>477</sup> Thus, they follow Bazin in lamenting the state of the festival, whose corruptions they see as a fall from the grace of cinephilia.<sup>478</sup> What they fail to understand is that art cinema is

perpetuated by the rituals of the circuit, *including* its tendency toward lamentation, and not by the particular tastes favored by those rituals. The fact that so *many* status-laden festivals like Cannes and Venice still award prizes through these rituals is sufficient to confirm that the art-cinema institution is alive—and the fact that so many people still lament the state of art cinema is sufficient to confirm that a “certain *idea* of art cinema” has been successfully handed down through that institution.

### Auteurism and the Institutional Function of “Crossover” Forums

Another institution that plays an important role in art cinema is film studies. This is a tricky case to make, since film studies is usually considered an academic institution, not a cinematic one. However, once we see that the mainstream world of movie reviews, trade presses, and Internet blogs cannot be cleanly separated from the academic world of peer-reviewed journals, university presses, and professional conferences we will be more open to the idea that film studies promotes art cinema in a variety of fashions. Still, if all these forums may claim to be “doing” film studies in some sense, they clearly do it in different ways, bringing varying kinds of expertise and legitimacy to the conversation. The most expert forums are peer-reviewed academic publications, where film scholars have critiqued the ideological bases of art cinema, its stress on auteurism in particular. These expert forums have the most *subcultural* legitimacy inside academia. However, scholars have also been free to participate in crossover forums where they may appear alongside more mainstream critics. The quasi-academic crossover publications can have large circulations and may constitute the most academic form of publication on cinema that non-academics encounter—and for that reason, they have more *cultural* legitimacy than peer-reviewed forums. Crossover forums are significant in that they channel their

academic credibility to promote the cinephilic discourses that have been mandated by their specific market constraints. Consequently, mainstream readers who do not recognize the difference between a fully academic, peer-reviewed text and a more popular, quasi-academic, crossover text may presume that all academics are in full agreement with art-cinema assumptions—and with auteurism in particular. To understand what this means *vis-à-vis* the genre itself, it helps to review two interrelated histories: the development of auteurism and the emergence of academic film studies.

Because I dealt with auteurism and “the auteur theory” in Chapter Three, I will only outline my conclusions as they relate to film studies. We should first recall that the idea of film authorship is as old as film itself and that the belief in the director as the most logical creative “center” of a movie goes back to the silent era. Ergo, we should look at the success of *Cahiers du cinéma* and the French New Wave at promoting *la politique des auteurs*—which later became known as “the auteur theory” by way of the American critic Andrew Sarris and journals like *Movie*—as a moment in the history of auteurism but not as the start of that history. However, the auteur theory did add momentum to the emerging discipline of film studies. Partly under the aegis of auteurism, academic film studies grew quickly in western nations from the late 1950s through the 1970s. The Society of Cinematologists (later renamed the Society for Cinema and Media Studies) was inaugurated in 1959 as followed by film-studies departments across the U.S. and the U.K..<sup>479</sup> These departments blended the professionalism of the older film-production schools with the critical slant of the highbrow journalism that appeared in *Cahiers du cinéma*, *Movie*, *Film Quarterly*, and many other crossover periodicals. One crucial aspect of this broad historical process, however, was that the auteur theory offered this emergent

discipline with an accessible and respectable sense of rigor that film scholars could then invoke to justify their field to outside administrators. Moreover, an auteurist brand of art cinema offered film studies a popular subject that many students were very motivated to study, adding even more momentum to this disciplinary shift.

Once the new field was established, however, it came to operate according to the mechanics that ruled elsewhere in the humanities: to get ahead in the field, its participants had to publish innovative research in peer-reviewed publications. What this meant was that the academic segment of film studies could *not* just stop with the auteur theory, as its more mainstream segments *had to* stop. The incentive behind the academic market is the pursuit of academic capital, which is mainly useful in that subculture. Its institutionally subsidized presses and journals are, then, designed to experiment with inaccessible ideas, meaning that film scholars have been encouraged to critique more popular theories, such as the auteur theory, when necessary. And such critiques often seemed necessary after 1968, when a combination of academic and political pressures led scholars to demolish the auteur theory in the publications of cutting-edge university presses and theoretically radical journals such as *Screen*, *Jump Cut*, and others.

Thus, in “Art Cinema as Institution,” Neale voiced what was by then recognized as the summary knock on auteurism: that it was “a means by which [film scholars] avoid coming to terms with the concept of film as social practice.”<sup>480</sup> Film scholars pursued this idea in a variety of ways. They argued that auteurism was untrue to the communal nature of film production and the industrial necessities of film promotion. They also argued that it was untrue to the realities of language, discourse, and consciousness; that it was untrue to the racist and patriarchal “apparatus” of cinema; and that it was untrue to the nature of

auteur status, which derived not from intrinsic talent or from intrinsic value but from the sociological processes of art, society, and the film industry.

Many of these ideas were convincing. But auteurism never went away. It turned out to be a fully human attitude that only grew more stable despite the criticism. Indeed, this stability has seemed beyond scholarly argument, probably because auteurism has enabled so much activity, helping us to talk and think about film—and because it has grown ever-more institutionally entrenched, providing its users with both collective and individual benefits. Among its collective users is film studies itself, whose auteurist lineage has proved adaptable, open to diverse agenda, including many that are politically progressive. As a result, even in the most academic sectors of film studies, we may still find auteurist thinking, from the standard conference paper on feminist and queer auteurs to the psychoanalytic treatise that is actually a loosely veiled variant of auteur study. And university presses still regularly publish openly cinephilic (i.e., theoretically retrograde) explorations of a single auteur *oeuvre* or single “masterwork.”

I make these points to explain why so many of us have taken part in the crossover forums. It is not simply that we are pursuing a mainstream form of success. Contrary to popular belief, scholars are humans, and auteurism appeals to us as such. And auteurism has ancestral legitimacy in academic film studies, where it is still accepted as a normative stance. Scholars who conform to the auteurism that dominates crossover publications are not, then, necessarily betraying academic traditions. What I want to stress, though, is that it is our participation in the crossover forums that gives those forums a quasi-academic bearing, reinforcing the legitimacy of their voices in the mainstream. And that dynamic

has in effect protected the traditional understanding of art cinema as a special genre, one that “deserves” its privileged place as a cinematic institution.

This shouldn’t surprise us, given Baumann’s belief that the cinema could not have been consecrated as legitimate without expert intellectual discourses working to justify it. These justifications emerged through the growing ties between the academy and the film industry and through the growing specialization of review-oriented publications, which evaluated movies in increasingly professional ways.<sup>481</sup> Haden Guest claims that by “the 1950s one can see productive debates . . . between popular film writing and the more rigorous academic writing beholden to standards of evidence and argumentation.”<sup>482</sup> Indeed, the more rigorous journals, like *Films in Review*, *Cinemages*, and *Film Culture*, may have been even more important outside film departments, where they “played a foundational role in establishing film studies as a major intellectual force across the humanities.”<sup>483</sup> Thus, they spoke to the educated general reader and the budding scholar. Today, journals in this crossover category include the U.S.’s *Film Quarterly*, *Film Comment*, and *Cineaste*; France’s *Cahiers du cinéma* and *Positif*; the U.K.’s *Sight & Sound*; and Canada’s *CineAction*, among many others.<sup>484</sup> These journals have juxtaposed mainstream critics with film scholars. Though they have regional tendencies, they are unified in their stress on auteurs and on art, with the corollary that the default subject of these magazines is the plastic notion of “the auteur work.”

Much the same might be said of certain presses—including Wallflower, Berg, BFI, Continuum, Twayne, etc.—that support the foundations of art cinema by subsidizing accessible academic tomes on auteurs, masterpieces, new waves, national cinemas, and even cult-art cinemas. Recently, Betz has published an essay focusing on the “little book”

in film studies: the small, sophisticated book written by specialists for non-specialists. To reach the widest audiences, imprints like the *Sight & Sound*-affiliated series Cinema One, which was active between 1967 and 1976, stressed in Betz's view a "circumscribed set of subjects," including "directors" and "nations/movements or the 'new' cinema."<sup>485</sup> This trend has persisted through today, Betz claims, noting the general prominence of British publications and the specific prominence of Wallflower:

The sizes and formats of [the Wallflower] series cut a swath between some of the much smaller little books in current publication and that of the standard university press monograph, denoting Wallflower's crossover address among those studying film within the educational sector and a new generation of the cineliterate fueling their passion from without. On the production end, there is room in its stable for both the academic scholar and the belletristic critic.<sup>486</sup>

Betz's insight is born out by *dekalog<sup>3</sup>: On Film Festivals* (2009), a Wallflower volume that I have cited in this essay. This physically small volume is quite useful in spite of the programmatic cinephilia that makes all its opinions suspect. But what this kind of book shows us is that auteurism, with its default cinephilia, still represents the one theoretical stance open to scholars who hope to apply their talents to trade publications. As Betz puts it neatly, "the predominance of the director as subject of study" has been a crucial force of "continuity" linking little books through the present day.<sup>487</sup>

What does this all add up to? Crossover publications reinforce art cinema's most cinephilic values through their persistent stress on art, on form, on canon—and on the auteur especially. In this way, they help to stabilize the category in the eyes of the public, making its foundational concepts seem impervious to fashion, academic fashion included. That film scholars take part in these publications is crucial to this effect, I think, for their participation can suggest to individuals located outside academia that the more radical aspects of film studies are symptoms of an academic flakiness that scholars are unwilling

to pursue in the most high-profile forums, where they instead corroborate the cultural distinction that mainstream critics have accorded art cinema. Thus, despite film studies' many deconstructive paradigms, the field has in this account actually lent a great deal of legitimacy to the conservative values that anchor art cinema.

Only by crafting institutional accounts like those above will we be in a position to deflect Thanouli's suggestion that "art cinema," a term that has facilitated the distribution of a diversity of themes and styles and institutions under a single heading, may in the end be too vacuous to be useful. I hope to have shown here that "art cinema" is *exceptionally* useful—and like "auteurism," it is not going to go away just because we have had enough of its dizzying forms and illogics. Instead, we should construct an institutional theory of art cinema that understands the formal heterogeneity implied by this useful heading not through a narrative lens or a formalist sensibility but through a supple cultural schema that relates the category's diversity to its institutions, including the art house, the festival, and the discipline of film studies. These accredited sites of evaluation have in effect fixed the value of art movies on their first release and have regulated that value over the long-term, often relying on art cinema's flexible ideologies, such as auteurism, to complete the ritual. But to grasp all this, we need *the term*. For whether we are unreformed cinephiles writing reviews or myth-busting scholars in dark sunglasses taking in the festival scene, the term "art cinema" is indispensable to all our projects.

## Chapter Eleven / Anti-Commercial Rhetoric in Art Cinema

428

### NOTES TO CHAPTER ELEVEN

<sup>1</sup>Eleftheria Thanouli, “‘Art Cinema’ Narration: Breaking Down a Wayward Paradigm,” *Scope*, vol. 14 (June 2009), p. 1. Available at <<http://www.scope.nottingham.ac.uk/issue.php?issue=14>>. Accessed June 21, 2009.

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<sup>2</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 9.

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<sup>3</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 11; see also p. 10.

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<sup>4</sup>Several extended critiques of Bordwell’s account have appeared lately. Besides Thanouli, see Mark Betz, “Beyond Europe: On Parametric Transcendence,” *Global Art Cinema: New Theories and Histories*, ed. Karl Schoonover and Rosalind Galt (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010), pp. 31-47; and András Bálint Kovács, *Screening Modernism: European Art Cinema, 1950-1980* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2007). While these critiques show respect for Bordwell’s work, they also manifest some disenchantment with it as well. I share in both feelings. I respect Bordwell’s immensely, but I see how his achievements have constrained alternative perspectives. But what I find particularly problematic is that Bordwell sees that what he calls “art-cinema narration” is one strand of a larger phenomenon that he calls the “international art cinema.” David Bordwell, *Narration in the Fiction Film* (1985; London: Routledge, 2008), p. 205. Even a conservative view of this broader phenomenon could position it as potentially including everything from pre-war *films d’arts*, to the interwar avant-gardes, to particular examples of classical Hollywood narration, to the art movies of the New Hollywood, and to the many art movies that *Narration in the Fiction Film* in effect distinguishes from art cinema by categorizing them under alternate headings (“historical-materialist narration,” “parametric narration,” and Godardian narration). Bordwell gives his own category, art-cinema narration, preferential status as the “true” art cinema, not just through the label itself but through the fact that he bluntly refers to its vehicle as “the art film.” Even if Bordwell’s narrative categories held water, which there is growing reason to doubt, this taxonomy would be misleading and incomplete—for it would not explain how so many other types of art movie have managed to *function*

as art cinema within the rubric of the “international art cinema” without actually being art cinema.

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<sup>432</sup> Thanouli, “‘Art Cinema’,” p. 6.

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<sup>433</sup> Bordwell has appended an “Afterword” to a reprint of his essay in *Poetics of Cinema* ([New York: Routledge, 2008], pp. 158-169). In this addendum, he makes many good points and apologizes at the start for being too general, with “no fine gradations allowed,” when writing “The Art Cinema as a Mode of Film Practice” back in the 1970s. Ibid., p. 158. Bordwell also acknowledges here the growth of many art-cinema institutions, especially the festival circuit, which he considers “the world’s alternative to Hollywood’s theatrical distribution system.” Ibid., p. 160. However, from this addendum, it is clear that he has retained the germ of his form- and narrative-based idea of art cinema, for he still sees this category as fundamentally rooted in “European art-cinema principles.” Ibid., p. 163. He has not, then, moved toward the institution-, subculture-, and value-based idea of art cinema that I propose here.

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<sup>434</sup> See, e.g., Bordwell, “The Art Cinema,” p. 723, where he refers to the New Hollywood as “an art cinema” but claims that American art films cannot be art films in the European sense, since they “warp art-cinema conventions in new directions (as the work of Altman and Coppola shows).” He makes a similar point in his book, which builds on this essay, as well as his recent addendum to this essay. See Bordwell, *Narration in the Fiction Film*, p. 232; and Bordwell, “Afterword,” p. 163. See also note 4 above.

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<sup>435</sup> Rosalind Galt and Karl Schoonover, “Introduction: The Impurity of Art Cinema,” *Global Art Cinema: New Theories and Histories* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010), p. 3; see pp. 3-9.

<sup>436</sup> Thanouli, “‘Art Cinema’,” p. 10.

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<sup>437</sup> Ibid., p. 7.

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<sup>438</sup> Ibid., p. 11, n. 1.

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<sup>439</sup> This has long been the most accepted way of understanding the rise of the postwar European art cinemas, but some innovative ideas are now emerging. For example, in a recent book, Betz argues that the postwar European art cinemas were generated not through opposition to Hollywood but through “the nostalgia produced by the loss of imperial power and unified national identity that the nation states of France and Italy encountered in their similar yet distinct relations to decolonization and modernization.” Mark Betz, *Beyond the Subtitle: Remapping European Art Cinema* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2009), p. 99. *Beyond the Subtitle* is also applicable to this chapter that it compares the Bordwell and Neale pieces discussed here. See Betz, *Beyond the Subtitle*, pp. 10-14.

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<sup>440</sup> Steve Neale, “Art Cinema as Institution,” *Screen* 22.1 (Spring 1981), p. 11.

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<sup>441</sup> The institutional approach profits Neale, then, by enabling him to see the obvious: that art cinema developed into a genre that did not “belong” to one industry or region but was instead a niche in which different Hollywood art cinemas (including Euro-Hollywood co-productions, the New Hollywood, the indie-style labels, and so on) might compete. Indeed, Hollywood could dominate certain art-movie markets, as it did in America after Miramax merged with Disney. This isn’t to claim that the opposition between Hollywood and European art cinema ever went away as a structuring mythology. It is instead to show that Hollywood could collaborate in the maintenance of this myth.

<sup>442</sup> Ibid., pp. 15-16.

<sup>443</sup> András Bálint Kovács, *Screening Modernism: European Art Cinema, 1950-1980* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2007), p. 24.

<sup>444</sup> Neale, “Art Cinema as Institution,” pp. 16-20.

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<sup>445</sup> Ibid., p. 24; see pp. 21-25.

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447 Ibid., pp. 27-28.

448 Ibid., p. 20.

449 Ibid. pp. 35-37.

450 Ibid., p. 35.

451 Haidee Wasson, *Museum Movies: The Museum of Modern Art and the Birth of Art Cinema* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2005), pp. 1-31.

452 Barbara Wilinsky, *Sure Seaters: The Emergence of Art House Cinema* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2001), pp. 41-79.

453 Andrew Tudor, "The Rise and Fall of the Art House Movie," *The Sociology of Art: Ways of Seeing*, ed. David Inglis and John Hughson (London: Basingstoke, 2005), p. 136.

454 Shyon Baumann, *Hollywood Highbrow: From Entertainment to Art* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2007), p. 67.

455 See Galt and Schoonover, "Introduction," pp. 3-8.

456 Thomas Elsaesser, "Film Festival Networks: The New Topographies of Cinema in Europe," *European Cinema: Face to Face with Hollywood* (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2005), p. 84. See also Kovács, *Screening Modernism*, pp. 25-26.

457 Nick James, "Whose Cinephilia?", *Sight & Sound*, vol. 19, no. 11 (November 2009), p. 5. The same figures are cited in Nick Roddick, "Window Shopping," *Sight & Sound*, vol. 19, no. 12 (December 2009), p. 13. Bordwell counts "about 250" major film festivals, "with hundreds more serving local, regional, and specialist audiences." Bordwell, "Afterword," p. 160. For an excellent online compendium of film-festival research, see Film Festival Research Network, "Film Festival Research," online scholarly resource. Available at <<http://www.filmfestivalresearch.org/>>. Accessed March 3, 2011.

458 See Shyon Baumann, "Intellectualization and Art World Development: Film in the United States," *American Sociological Review*, vol. 66 (June 2001), pp. 408-409. See also Baumann, *Hollywood Highbrow*, pp. 54-59; on U.S. festivals, see pp. 56-57.

459 Bordwell, "Afterword," p. 160.

460 Elsaesser, "Film Festival Networks," p. 87.

461 Ibid., p. 86.

462 Ibid.

463 Baumann, "Intellectualization and Art World Development," p. 409.

464 Elsaesser, "Film Festival Networks," p. 99.

465 Azadeh Farahmand, "Disentangling the International Festival Circuit: Genre and Iranian Cinema," *Global Art Cinema: New Theories and Histories*, ed. Rosalind Galt and Karl Schoonover (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010), p. 266.

<sup>466</sup> André Bazin, "The Festival Viewed as a Religious Order" (1955), *dekalog<sup>3</sup>: On Film Festivals*, ed. Richard Porton (London: Wallflower, 2009), pp. 15-18.

<sup>467</sup> Marijke de Valck, *Film Festivals: From European Geopolitics to Global Cinephilia* (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2008), pp. 186-187.

<sup>468</sup> Elsaesser, "Film Festival Networks," p. 107n28. For more on the business details of the festival circuit, see Peter Biskind's book *Down and Dirty Pictures: Miramax, Sundance, and the Rise of Independent Film* (2004), Steve Montal's article "Film Festivals and Markets" (2005), and Richard Porton's collection *dekalog<sup>3</sup>: On Film Festivals* (2009), which contains a number of useful essays like Mark Peranson's contribution, which describes the centrality of the sales agent in the commercial hierarchies of the film festival. Mark Peranson, "First You Get the Power, Then You Get the Money: Two Models of Film Festivals," *dekalog<sup>3</sup>: On Film Festivals*, ed. Richard Porton (London: Wallflower, 2009), pp. 23-37.

<sup>469</sup> Elsaesser, "Film Festival Networks," pp. 92-93.

<sup>470</sup> Ibid., p. 91. It is for this reason that theorists like Neale and Kovács identify the festival with the global character of art cinema. See, e.g., Kovács, *Screening Modernism*, p. 25.

<sup>471</sup> Ibid., p. 93.

<sup>472</sup> Thanouli, "'Art Cinema'," p. 9.

<sup>473</sup> As Farahmand has put it, festivals "exert a direct or indirect influence on film production because of the role they play in helping a film transition from local economies to the global market." Farahmand, "Disentangling the International Festival Circuit," p. 267. Later, she explains how this process has worked in the context of recent Iranian art films. Ibid., pp. 272-276. Betz also touches on this process. See Betz, "Beyond Europe," pp. 31-32.

<sup>474</sup> Thanouli, "'Art Cinema'," pp. 7-8.

<sup>475</sup> Farahmand, "Disentangling the International Festival Circuit," p. 265.

<sup>476</sup> Elsaesser, "Film Festival Networks," p. 100.

See, for example, Mike Hale, "The Underside of a Film Festival, Where Some Dark Treasures Dwell," *New York Times*, online edition (April 22, 2010), pp. 1-2. Available at <<http://www.nytimes.com/2010/04/23/movies/23cinemania.html?8dpc>>. Accessed April 23, 2010.

<sup>477</sup> Joan Hawkins, "Culture Wars: Some New Trends in Art Horror," *Jump Cut: A Review of Contemporary Media*, no. 51 (Spring 2009), p. 2; see pp. 1-2.

<sup>478</sup> This is the pattern of *dekalog<sup>3</sup>: On Film Festivals*, which not only reprints the Bazin essay but follows it with essay after essay lamenting the corrupt state of the international festival circuit, whose overweening commercialism it depicts as an affront to cinephilia and the larger notion of the film as high art. As Robert Koehler puts it in this collection, the "central problem with film festivals . . . is not so much a willingness to show bad films . . . It is their general and unexamined aversion to cinephilia, and an unwillingness to place cinephilia at the centre of festivals' activities." Robert Koehler, "Cinephilia and Film Festivals," *dekalog<sup>3</sup>: On Film Festivals*, ed. Richard Porton (London: Wallflower, 2009), p. 81. This attitude of continual lamentation over the commercialization of a festival circuit that was once pure has been ritually restated in crossover forums and cinephile forums alike; for another recent example, see Nick Roddick, "Window Shopping," *Sight & Sound*, vol. 19, no. 12 (December 2009), p. 13.

<sup>479</sup> Baumann, "Intellectualization and Art World Development," pp. 409-410.

<sup>480</sup> Neale, "Art Cinema as Institution," p. 37.

<sup>481</sup> See Baumann, *Hollywood Highbrow*, pp. 66-69 and pp. 111-160.

<sup>482</sup>

<sup>483</sup> Lee Grieveson and Haidee Wasson, "Introduction," *Inventing Film Studies*, ed. Lee Grieveson and Haidee Wasson (Durham: Duke University Press, 2008), p. xxiv.

<sup>484</sup> Ibid.

<sup>485</sup> Near the start of his essay, Neale pithily indicates the importance that a crossover publication like *Sight & Sound* has played in maintaining the institutions of art cinema: "During the 1960s and early 1970s, at a time when the polemics surrounding 'popular culture' and Hollywood were at their height, Art Cinema was often defined as the 'enemy': as a bastion of 'high art' ideologies, as the kind of cinema supported by *Sight and Sound* and the critical establishment, therefore, as the kind of cinema to be fought." Neale, "Art Cinema as Institution," p. 12.

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<sup>487</sup> Mark Betz, "Little Books," *Inventing Film Studies*, ed. Lee Grieveson and Haidee Wasson (Durham: Duke University Press, 2008), p. 323.

<sup>488</sup>

<sup>489</sup> Ibid., p. 340.

<sup>490</sup>

<sup>491</sup> Ibid.

"They shared an indifference for money."  
—*Jules et Jim* (François Truffaut, 1962)

One of art cinema's structuring myths is the idea that art opposes commerce. The centrality of this myth has been recognized by the most accomplished scholars in the field, from Steve Neale, David Bordwell, and Peter Lev to Andrew Tudor, Barbara Wilinsky, and Shyon Baumann. This centrality has also been reflected in the narrative arcs of many traditional art films, including Oliver Assayas's *Irma Vep* (1996) and Hal Hartley's *The Girl From Monday* (2005) as well as Michelangelo Antonioni's *La notte* (1961) and François Truffaut's *Jules et Jim*. In this quintessentially romantic mythology, art cinema is high art, and high art is useless, existing beyond economics. It may seem odd to apply these ideas to narrative formats like the traditional art film, whose costs and appeals to the audience make them appear "incongruent with the aims of an art world and more in line with entertainment and amusement."<sup>488</sup> But having studied aestheticism for decades, I can say without doubt that logic matters little here. At least since Edgar Allan Poe, this myth has readily contained its contradictions.

The main contradiction is, of course, the fact that this aestheticist viewpoint has *itself* had a profound commercial impact on art cinema, just as it has had a similar impact on other high arts. It has, for instance, given numerous art cinemas, including *Hollywood* art cinemas, an anti-Hollywood identity that has helped them establish distinctive market niches. Art houses and film festivals have been part of this process, of course; their class-based atmospherics and devotion to a purist idea of Cinema have masked their economic functions in the industry and the larger culture. The anti-commercial attitudes that they have engendered have in turn led critics to stress form and auteurism, while discouraging them from looking at more “impure” issues like stardom. Thus, the cliché of the auteur as someone who rejects commerce in favor of art and self-expression has been a central way in which many filmmakers have promoted their works.

Clearly, such rhetoric offers an impractical portrayal of the most commercial art cinemas. But it also presents a very difficult obstacle for untraditional art cinemas, like cult art cinema and mainstream art cinema, to overcome. Unlike traditional art films, cult art movies and mainstream art movies often hail from fields that are very open about their commercialism. Hence, these movies have little chance of being recognized as legitimate art cinemas, for their own subcultural rhetoric seems to exclude them from that status—unless, of course, we were to at them from *inside* their subcultures, where they may be positioned as the purest cinema available. On the other hand, we should keep in mind that this anti-commercial rhetoric also offers a misleading idea of art cinemas that, on first glance, seem to match its principles, like theater-based forms of experimental cinema or museum-based forms of video art. As we saw in Chapter Seven, the subcultural prestige and artistic status that accompany avant-garde “purity” can confer economic benefits on

creators, distributors, and viewers—even if this purity costs little to achieve, even if it generates no cash. In other words, the myth only *seems* more applicable in avant-garde or art-world sectors; it isn't absolutely true of any art cinema.

But in the end, this anti-commercial rhetoric is stable, unlikely to change anytime soon. As Baumann puts it, the “beliefs and values of Western societies deem commercial interests antithetical to the legitimacy of art”—and that, for now, is that.<sup>489</sup> Like authorship, anti-commercial rhetoric is a resilient feature of art cinema because it is a resilient feature of the larger discourse on high art. Scholars may outline the roots of this rhetoric in art history while speculating on its deeper roots in our biological nature, but the fact remains that art cinema is a high-art genre, and high art as currently understood across this planet aspires to romantic uselessness and commercial purity. Individuals and institutions have strong incentives to support this rhetoric, to reinforce it, despite its contradictions. So, as scholars, we must decide how to deal with this rhetoric.

In the space below, I take on three tasks. First, I briefly outline the history of this anti-commercial rhetoric as a high-art discourse and speculate about its much longer roots in our collective human nature. Then I demonstrate the actual inadequacy of this rhetoric as it relates to various issues in the genre, including budget diversity, indie “authenticity,” and so on. The conclusion of this chapter explains very briefly why this anti-commercial rhetoric has remained a vibrant part of art cinema at both the individual and institutional levels. This explanation allows me to contemplate how we might, as academics, continue in our scholarly travails without becoming so complacent as to accept this peculiar purist rhetoric as a realistic perspective on the art of art cinema.

### A Short History of a Purist Rhetoric

“Anything illegal is illegal because it makes people more

money that way.”

—*The Connection* (Shirley Clarke, 1962)

As I have noted, art cinema’s anti-commercial rhetoric has strong affinities with a similar rhetoric that rules the art world. This is why it is common for artists and curators to refer to museum-based forms of moving-image art as un-commercial, as “pure,” while simply taking it for granted that no other art cinema, including even theater-based forms of avant-garde cinema, may make similar claims. But if the purity of the museum world is a culturally dominant illusion, it is an illusion nevertheless. Galleries and artists must pay their bills, so they must raise money and gather and confer prestige in their special ways. Ergo, their anti-commercialism is an institutional style—a set of surfaces, a set of distinctive marketing campaigns—not an unquestionable fact. Moreover, there is little doubt that art cinema’s claims of anti-commercialism are rooted in those of the art world, given the rhetorical convergences and outright borrowings that experimental cinema, the “purest” of the theatrical art cinemas, has shared with the broader art world going back to the modernist film experiments of Dada and Surrealism.

Where did this purist rhetoric come from? In the art world, it is a legacy of the broad, socioeconomic changes that disrupted the medieval guilds and the systems of art patronage that had supported European artists and artisans prior to the Renaissance. (See Chapter One.) By the nineteenth century, the pressures of capitalist markets chronically over-supplied with skilled craftsmen had led arch-romantics like Poe, patron saint of the French aesthetes, into increasingly aestheticist positions, through which they strove to create a new and economically competitive view of themselves that differentiated pure, elite artists, who by choice or necessity made useless, increasingly abstract forms of art, from the craft-oriented artisans who dominated the newly degraded commercial or

popular arts. Of course, this new romantic perspective mostly neglected the economic realities of the emerging art markets, with their auction houses and their sensitivity to fashion, and those of the emerging museum world, which sanctified so much useless art in high-maintenance cathedrals where individual works could be properly placed, lit, and revered.<sup>490</sup> In effect, then, the nineteenth-century romantics elevated and stabilized the nominally anti-commercial business practices still evident in today's art worlds, where artists must still deny that they are pursuing economic capital (cash) or cultural capital (fame, status, influence) in order to secure those things.<sup>491</sup>

This, of course, is only the modern incarnation of this notion of purity. Certainly, broader aspirations to the pure and the sacred—as well as an equally sweeping distrust of money as “the root of all evil”—have been part of the human experience from prehistoric times and may be the ultimate source of this purist rhetoric. Such rhetoric could be linked to many human behaviors, including the preference for play for play's sake. Evolutionary theorists have even speculated that sexual selection might well govern our preference for romantic ideals and the status that they help us secure. Indeed, as Geoffrey Miller has reminded us, the radical cost of a behavior, in combination with its “apparent uselessness . . . and manifest beauty,” most often indicated to Charles Darwin that the “behavior had a hidden courtship function.”<sup>492</sup> This idea would support scientists who believe that human adulation of useless artistic forms and animal displays of seemingly useless natural forms like the peacock's tail are in fact interlinked phenomena.<sup>493</sup>

But in the end this sort of evolutionary conjecture must remain in the background. It can help us grasp why this anti-commercial rhetoric is so stable as to seem permanent. However, if we pressed these speculations by arguing that a Darwinian logic *proves* that

this anti-commercial rhetoric *really* is permanent, we would damage our arguments—and not just because our ideas would be moving beyond what we can defend biologically or even historically. After all, this anti-commercial rhetoric is a fairly recent phenomenon in the art world. I have seen no evidence that it had a similar import in the many art worlds that existed before the Renaissance. So I think we are better off basing our theories on a more modest and almost indisputable point: anti-commercial rhetoric is now a stable and necessary part of art cinema because it has been a stable, even necessary part of our post-romantic concepts of high art, wherever they have manifested.

What is so striking is that art cinema's postwar partisans successfully applied this anti-commercial myth to narrative cinema, which was before the Second World War very popular and openly commercial—even though this rhetoric had typically been used to distinguish high art from more popular, commercial arts. The conservative guardians of what was, even then, an increasingly global culture were unable to stop the peculiarly democratic spread of this elitist rhetoric for at least two reasons. First, as an amorphous collective, art culture has never been subject to central regulation, meaning the broader public has been under no legal obligation to accept the authority of its most conservative “experts”—especially if alternative experts, like those associated with film festivals, have successfully challenged that authority. Second, as Baumann shows, the elevation of the cinema in the U.S. depended in part on the American public losing some interest in the movies as it gained new entertainments, like television, and new diversions, like driving.<sup>494</sup> In other words, defenders of the high-art status of the traditional art film gradually won the day through sheer persistence and by dint of the fact that a new “opportunity space” had opened up in postwar culture, allowing the cinema's status to be

redefined such that it contained both highbrow and lowbrow potentials.<sup>495</sup> In this way, the practice of applying high-art rhetorics to an art form that was once classified at the global level as primarily or *only* commercial was normalized until it became “official.”

### Several Disproofs

At this point, we should discuss why I think that this anti-commercial rhetoric is spurious. My main reason for harboring this belief is that all we know in life is material, and much of that material has economic significance. This fact is particularly true in the cinema, where filmmakers could never live in Thoreauvian solitude, making their tools and materials from scratch. I have heard of impoverished filmmakers who have limited their equipment to stationary videocameras facing in a single direction. I have also heard of impoverished filmmakers who have used nothing but strips of film on which they have scratched designs. I have even heard of filmmakers who have used romantic rationales to justify their theft of equipment they could not afford to purchase.<sup>496</sup> But I have never heard of filmmakers *making* their own cameras, film stocks, or projection apparatuses. To make movies is to insert oneself into an economy that depends at least somewhat on technology and on commerce, at least somewhat on private financing or on public funds. Moreover, for a filmmaker, getting one’s movies produced, exhibited, preserved, and classified as “art” is a difficult and competitive proposition that can come down to that filmmaker’s accumulation of auteur prestige, which has many different economic dimensions, from one’s educational background and one’s institutional credentials to one’s prior success in the financing, production, and distribution of art movies.

If we accept this logic, every example should demonstrate that naïve applications of this rhetoric make no sense. And such is the case. Consider, for example, the purpose

of so many *Sight & Sound* editorials<sup>497</sup>: to push for larger allocations of state funds for the makers of “independent” films. The fact that a premiere art-cinema publication like *Sight & Sound* spends so much time pressing this political stance tells us that art cinema does not exist apart from economics. But let us forget that institutional detail for just now and focus on the hypothetical filmmaker who is the benefactor of all this effort: the pure-art, indie auteur who *Sight & Sound* imagines “deserves” the chance to make films without worrying about money. Even if an auteur could in some qualified sense be said to deserve such an honor, could that auteur ever really achieve such a zen state? Only, I think, if he or she were serene to begin with. After all, an auteur granted such a subsidy would have to secure it through an economic context that would force him or her to grapple with a number of fiscal concerns. To win such funding, the auteur would have to demonstrate a competence based on status and accomplishment, and he or she would have to use those credentials to compete against other auteurs in a status economy. And winning this sort of subsidy would not guarantee that the auteur would stay pure and independent. The auteur would have a budget, but a budget is an economic factor, not a release from the same. So the auteur would still have to worry over that budget. Ergo, he or she would still have to make choices designed, first, to justify the subsidy; second, to get his or her movie before a chosen audience; and, third, to keep the funds rolling. For wrapped up in all this would be a worry that consumes so many filmmakers, however they secure their financing: the creeping anxiety over how to raise money for future projects.<sup>498</sup>

On the other hand, the fact that a cult auteur, who is usually thought to be in a far more commercial sector of the film industry, has been obsessed with exploitation films or with big-budget genre vehicles does not mean that his or her intentions are any less pure

or any less personal than those of traditional auteurs. This fact is borne out by the pulp aestheticism that is prominent in cult sectors, whether it is manifested through the fairly obscure cult art movies of Anna Biller, including “A Visit from the Incubus” (2001) and *Viva* (2007), or the high-profile cult art movies of Quentin Tarantino, including *Pulp Fiction* (1994) and *Inglourious Basterds* (2009). Indeed, the filmmaker with the purest, most aestheticist rhetoric that I have ever heard, Tony Marsiglia, has made a patently commercial form of softcore for Seduction Cinema.<sup>499</sup> Of course, cult auteurs do fret over money, for no filmmaker can escape economics. But the fact remains that just because these cult auteurs are rarely eligible for public support does not mean that they are more susceptible to financial worries or to mercenary intentions. Though it may pain traditional cinephiles to admit this, many cult auteurs simply prefer cult movies and cult areas to traditional art films, to traditional areas. What we should deduce from this is that this purist rhetoric cannot be trusted to tell us anything true about auteur psychology or about the economic factors behind film production and distribution. Its social function is to lead consumers, including critics, to classify auteurs and their movies within a high-art rubric. Producers, distributors, and critics recognize that the rhetoric that enmeshes art movies is necessary to their place in the genre. But this rhetoric is usually just that: rhetoric. It does not correspond to a specific funding scheme or motive.

All of which may be demonstrated in a different way by thinking about budgets. One part of this super-genre’s anti-commercial rhetoric is that it has encouraged critics to describe art cinema as a low-to-medium-cost affair. Indeed, many people still believe that the “‘art film’ occup[ies],” as Geoffery Nowell-Smith puts it, a “different economic and cultural space from the run-of-the-mill commercial production.”<sup>500</sup> The logic of the “low”

portion of this equation is clear, since it is in line with our ideas of purity and allows us to include in the category avant-garde experiments and do-it-yourself productions like those recently classified as “mumblecore.”<sup>501</sup> The logic of the “medium” portion is less clear, though it seems to say that filmmakers can buy some craft, some polish, without having to fall into the anti-art excess of big-budget Hollywood.

But if we think about the matter clearly, we will see that the low-to-medium idea, which is “almost as old as cinema itself,” is not necessary to art cinema.<sup>502</sup> To recognize this, we should recall that art movies have been classified as such regardless of their cost. Obviously, art cinema would be more readily accepted as high art if it were, as Baumann notes, “solely in the hands of nonprofit organizations.”<sup>503</sup> But this hasn’t been a necessity; indeed, sometimes art movies arrive with big budgets. This fact can embarrass critics, but it doesn’t stop them from categorizing such movies as art cinema. Witness this classic dodge: when Manohla Dargis of *The New York Times* classified *Public Enemies* (2009), Michael Mann’s eighty-million-dollar star vehicle, as one of his “big-budget art movies,” she was careful to note that it had a “resolutely noncommercial” spirit.<sup>504</sup> She did this, it seems, to offset the oddness of placing an expensive gangster movie in a genteel category identified with much more modest means. This is not an isolated phenomenon. Many “art blockbusters” have been produced in Hollywood over the past few decades, and directors continue to be classified as “blockbuster auteurs” today.<sup>505</sup>

What is more, in the 1970s, when art cinema all but ruled Hollywood through the ascendancy of the New Hollywood, the idea that Hollywood was a high art was certainly common—but it depended on a “fantasy” wherein Hollywood somehow figured as a field of “restricted production” in the Bourdieuan sense.<sup>506</sup> As a result, critics have often had

to reconcile these movies with the low-to-medium-cost paradigm that ostensibly governs art cinema. The ingenuity that they have displayed in doing this reinforces the fact that art cinema's rhetoric can be bent in multiple ways. Consider one of the most ballyhooed Hollywood disasters of all time: Michael Cimino's forty-million-dollar *Heaven's Gate* (1980), the art western whose huge cost bankrupted United Artists and, as legend has it, the New Hollywood as well. Because Cimino was an auteur, critics have spun this tale into something more than one of Hollywood excess. Instead, the legend surrounding *Heaven's Gate* has often taken on the trappings of a story about an indie auteur who thumbed his nose at his bosses, following his muse into artistic excess. In other words, because *Heaven's Gate* was made by a director with credentials, the movie's costs may be defended as proof of *artistic intent*, not of mercenary intent.

On the other hand, it is no accident that the lowest-cost filmmakers have often had great subcultural status, with their lack of support authenticating the purity of innovators such as Maya Deren and Stan Brakhage. Indeed, in the legitimate art cinemas, we see an abject lack of material support in two sectors: in experimental cinemas, where poverty has often spurred invention; and at the start of new waves or national cinemas, where stories of low-cost films securing broad distribution quickly becomes the stuff of legend. Thus, it is no wonder that auteurs hoping to break into markets often point to their low-cost ways as a virtue that they would choose regardless of their resources. This line of thinking has sedimented through the circulation of "founding" documents.<sup>507</sup> Consider the manifesto of the New American Cinema. There Jonas Mekas and his colleagues state that a low budget "goes with our ethical and esthetic beliefs, directly connected with the things we want to say, and the way we want to say them."<sup>508</sup> It is no coincidence, then,

that this low-budget ethos has been taken for granted at festivals devoted to experimental cinema, like Ann Arbor, or to indie film, like Sundance and Slamdance. Nor is it very surprising that this ethos has been institutionalized by indie forums such as *Filmmaker Magazine* or the Independent Spirit Awards, where recently the John Cassavetes Award was reserved for movies made for under \$500,000. Indeed, due to its place in art cinema lore, the low-budget is even celebrated by the programmers of the most chichi festivals, including Cannes, Venice, Berlin, Toronto, and Rotterdam.

But if we look closely, we can see two related problems with this respect for low budgets. First, it can be so thin that it is often no more than window-dressing. Take, for example, the fact that as of 2009 the main competition at the Independent Spirit Awards allowed films costing up to twenty-million dollars and required them either to have had a theatrical release or to have been released to a set of approved festivals, all of which were highly exclusive; it also charged their producers a hefty fee. These requirements served to keep out the riff-raff, in effect allowing well-heeled operations, especially Hollywood's indie-style divisions, to dominate the event and making it a little bit doubtful that a latter-day Cassavetes could qualify for the main competition.

But the biggest problem with this respect for low budgets is that no one can say what a "low" budget is. This is because art cinema is complex, containing many sectors, all of which contain unique budget ranges often determined by wholly relative business constraints. Because the concept of the low budget can be indefinite, artistically arbitrary, and wholly relative, it can be used in multiple ways by individuals looking to certify their own status. For example, an indie-style art film may seem like a medium-cost movie as compared to a Hollywood behemoth like *Avatar* (2009). Budget-wise, though, it falls into

the highest end of the art-film area, making it difficult to compare such a film to ultra-low-budget indies such as *Stranger than Paradise* (1984) or *Funny Ha Ha* (2002). In effect, this means that the partisans of the lowest cost films, like experimental movies, can use their miniscule expenses to call into question the motives of the many auteurs who spend significantly more than they do. So avant-garde artisans can question the motives of *all* traditional art films—or, in a different milieu, Jarmusch-style directors of low-cost art films can cast darts at the motives of filmmakers with budgets of, say, more than ten million dollars. Unfortunately, for all of these low-budget directors, as dollar investment falls, so as a rule does industrial distribution—meaning that their subcultural prestige may rise even as their overall cultural reputation becomes more and more limited (and thus not that economically useful) due to the limited circulation of their films. This, I think, is why the indie-style directors have been uniquely powerful, influential, over the past several decades: their subcultural prestige may not have always been as high as the prestige of more experimental and/or underfinanced auteurs, but through their extremely reliable Hollywood distribution, they have consistently managed to achieve an enviable balance of mainstream penetration and high-art status.

Of course, if art cinema's anti-commercial rhetoric were actually "true," none of this would be possible. Artistic accomplishment would be separate from economic issues like funding, status, or distribution. But the debates over the "authenticity" of indie-style filmmakers show that this purist rhetoric is *not* true—in part because its guileless naïveté is a useful mask that obscures the market-based logic behind various art-film movements. To understand what I mean here, it helps to draw on Michael Z. Newman's 2009 *Cinema Journal* article, "Indie Culture: In Pursuit of the Authentic Autonomous Alternative." In

this brilliant article—as in Newman’s equally brilliant new book<sup>509</sup>—the author claims that “indie cinema, like indie culture more generally, derives its identity from challenging the mainstream. This challenge is figured first of all from an economic distinction between modes of production. ‘Indie’ connotes small-scale, personal, artistic, and creative; ‘mainstream’ implies a large-scale commercial media industry that values money more than art.”<sup>510</sup> The distinctions imply that the acquisition of a legendary American indie like Miramax by a major studio like Disney should decimate the former, destroying its credibility and the unique sensibility of its indie products. But according to Newman, this is exactly what did *not* happen. Instead, the “mainstreaming of indie amplified rather than diminished its salience as a cultural category.”<sup>511</sup> Through this transformation, which would have been impossible without Hollywood distribution, indie culture was revealed as a consumer category, one that a studio could, arguably, market more effectively than a smaller, more indie concern.

Those guided by indie ethics have rarely approved of such developments. But even they had to have had mixed feelings, since indie culture, in opposing corporate homogeneity, has supported consumer choice as well. The ties forged between the indie film movement and the Hollywood industry in the 1990s might have seemed unlikely given the anti-corporate posturing of the indie scene in the 1980s and early 1990s. Yet a market logic made these developments almost predictable. The indies were entrepreneurs selling products not offered by the major distributors. They sold those products so well that the majors formed alliances with them, helping them reach new publics. Because the indies wanted to increase market diversity by reaching broader publics, only the idealists among them could have rejected this outcome entirely.

That said, almost all indie producers have at one time or another cast themselves as idealists, so this result was bound to occasion much hand-wringing. What few people noticed, though, was that the competitors who leveled the charges of hypocrisy against the “sell outs” were part of the commodity system, too, and were in that sense susceptible to the same charges. *All* indie filmmakers have offered “products, objects for sale in the culture market.”<sup>512</sup> These products have, as Newman puts it, been made to seem “more legitimate than other objects for sale in the culture market” through an anti-commercial “rhetoric of autonomy, authenticity, and distinction.” In the end, this anti-commercial rhetoric can be nothing more than a tag line, a specialized marketing tool that competing business interests must wrestle over, since none of them can ever own exclusive rights to it.<sup>513</sup> Only when confronted with the possibility of actually selling out to big corporations would indie producers have faced these “authenticity” issues head-on. At such times, they would have seen the irony at the “heart of indie cinema and culture,” which Newman has referred to as the tension between the indie ideal of the band of “outsiders that sees itself as the solution to an excessively homogenized, commercialized media” and indie’s reality as a “form of expression that is itself commercial and that also serves to promote the interests of a class of sophisticated consumers.”<sup>514</sup> Given that the indies could provide such expression from inside corporate America, it is no wonder that many of them settled for “merely” providing consumers with more choices.

For me, what has always been more interesting than the question of whether the indies would “sell out” was the question of whether Hollywood studios would screw up their new product lines. Remember, Hollywood had never before embraced this particular art-cinema model. It had profited from aspirational art cinemas since the 1960s at least,

but in those days, its strategy was to buy up subsidiaries that specialized in foreign art films, which it would then distribute, or to serve as a silent partner in co-productions that were most often helmed by foreign auteurs.<sup>515</sup> Later, in the 1970s, Hollywood brought art cinema to the mainstream through the New Hollywood. But starting in the 1990s, studios often tried to manage their labels in the way that The Gap, an apparel company, has long managed its own product lines: by protecting the distinctiveness of each (domestic) brand within a broader company. Could Disney maintain Miramax as its own Banana Republic? Clearly, Hollywood could only protect its new brands if it maintained a hands-off policy, for those brands aspired to the high-art status identified with auteur autonomy. Meddling would be a crisis of publicity at least as much as a crisis of creativity. Knowing this, the studios frequently trumpeted the “autonomy” of their indie-style divisions even as media outlets like *Variety* remained vigilant for signs of meddling.

Despite some bumps along the way—Larry Clark’s *Kids* (1995) comes to mind—the Disney and Miramax team often succeeded from the mid-1990s on.<sup>516</sup> Guided by the example of earlier indie-style divisions, like Sony Pictures Classics, which Sony formed in 1992 as an “autonomous” division within itself, Disney avoided hurting Miramax with its family-friendly image and Miramax avoided hurting Disney with its tendency to sell itself through contrived controversies.<sup>517</sup> Similar successes were recorded elsewhere, such that the first collective pullback in this market segment did not occur until the recession of 2008, when specialty divisions such as Warner Independent Pictures and Paramount Vantage were either shut down or folded into their corporate parents.<sup>518</sup> For Newman, what was most fascinating about this era of successful internal specialization was that it showed media conglomerates “offer[ing] their own alternative to themselves, bringing

in . . . consumers who might be contemptuous of their very existence.”<sup>519</sup> But from another point of view, we might see that this is what transnational corporations do everywhere. If Hollywood had not figured out how to make it work with art movies, this would not have meant that it couldn’t work. But the studios *did* make it work, learning lessons from one another as well as from their past experiences with art cinema.

Newman contends that the condition of indie culture is not unique to it. “There is a history of this kind of dynamic animating alternative scenes,” he notes, “from the bohemia of 1920s Greenwich Village to the countercultures of the 1960s and 1970s.”<sup>520</sup> But Newman may be too timid here. By historicizing indie rhetoric through alternative cultures only, he misses its connections to the most authoritative and all-encompassing indie culture of all, namely, the world of high art. If we look on global culture as a kind of culture-producing machine, the world of high art occupies the same position *vis-à-vis* that larger culture that, say, Sony Pictures Classic occupies *vis-à-vis* its corporate parent: each is a privileged place of ostensible autonomy, seemingly free of the corrupting influences of money, and each rests *within* a larger social entity more openly obsessed with economics. But theorists should not take indie anti-commercialism at face value. For if we look at the mechanics of these apparently autonomous institutions, we quickly see that they work to the benefit of their larger groups and are as concerned with finances as they, though in specialized ways that conceal the fact.

### Conclusion: The Stability of Anti-Commercial Rhetoric

Despite the fact that that art cinema’s anti-commercial rhetoric is not defensibly rational, we need to approach it carefully. The first thing that we must do is realize that, for all its inadequacies as epistemology, this rhetoric is stable and will not be going away

just because we have refuted it by academic means. Indeed, it is so stable, so rooted in every aspect of the genre, that it is unlikely to fade from the academy, either, because it is a mandatory feature of crossover forums such as *Film Quarterly*, *CineAction*, and *Positif*. Because of this stability, we must improvise strategies for dealing with this purist rhetoric that allow us to acknowledge it without succumbing to it.

Obviously, this sounds a lot like what I said about auteurism. Like auteurism, this rhetoric is so useful, adaptable, and seemingly “natural” that it has insinuated itself into virtually every conversation about art movies and, as noted above, many contexts devoted to art cinema. Not only does this rhetoric help our institutions to define value, it helps people do the same, fostering the fuzzy albeit human ideas (of authenticity, of purity, of spirituality) that help them justify the fuzzy, albeit human values that they desire. But this rhetoric differs from auteur rhetoric in two salient respects. First, unlike auteurism, it is necessary to the genre because it makes art cinema a high art—i.e., it makes art cinema *art cinema*. Though something like the genre could likely exist in the absence of auteurist paradigms, art cinema couldn’t exist without this purist rhetoric, for it distinguishes high art from low art throughout the arts. As long as this rhetoric retains this wide function, the overt partisans of art cinema must defend the genre in purist terms so as to correspond to the cultural value that is evident in other high-art spheres.

On the other hand, there is a relatively good opportunity to overcome this rhetoric in academia. Consider how difficult it is to think outside auteurist terms when discussing art cinema. Authorship is not only institutionally mandated, it is also cognitively and linguistically convenient—such that it is hard to talk about art cinema without it. This is why I continue to use auteur names and have insisted that we must open the canon to a

broader array of mainstream auteurs and cult auteurs. But we needn't perpetuate anti-commercial rhetoric in a similar way. We needn't, in other words, invent new academic methods for using this rhetoric—methods that could be interpreted as lending it some measure of support. Anti-commercial rhetoric is simply not as necessary to our academic discussions of art cinema as auteurism, for it is quite possible to discuss art cinema without crediting this rhetoric at all. Consequently, it is realistic to think, or perhaps to hope, that academics might, in some not-too-distant time, move decisively beyond this kind of rhetoric—in peer-reviewed forums, if nowhere else.

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488

## NOTES TO CHAPTER TWELVE

<sup>489</sup>Shyon Baumann, *Hollywood Highbrow: From Entertainment to Art* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2007), p. 77. See also András Bálint Kovács, *Screening Modernism: European Art Cinema, 1950-1980* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2007), pp. 22-25. According to Kovács, the split in art cinema between the avant-garde movie and the art film occurred because the latter wanted, in the words of Germaine Dulac, to be somewhat “commercial, but not enough to pander to nervous ignorants.” Quoted in *ibid.*, p. 23; Dulac’s italics. This entailed a “semicommercial” art cinema that required both specialized audiences and state support. *Ibid.*, p. 24.

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<sup>490</sup>Baumann, *Hollywood Highbrow*, p. 177.

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<sup>491</sup>Very similar points could be made, of course, about the economic realities of highbrow literature, whose poetry journals and experimental novels have over the past centuries been increasingly subsidized by academia or by government grants.

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<sup>492</sup>See Larry Shiner, *The Invention of Art: A Cultural History* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2001).

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<sup>493</sup>Geoffrey Miller, “Arts of Seduction” (2000), *Evolution, Literature, and Film: A Reader*, ed. Brian Boyd, Joseph Carroll, and Jonathan Gottschall (New York: Columbia University Press, 2010), p. 158.

493

<sup>494</sup>See, e.g., Steven Pinker, *How the Mind Works* (1997; New York: Norton, 2009), pp. 500-501.

494

<sup>495</sup>Bauman, *Hollywood Highbrow*, pp. 9-10. Baumann makes it clear that the cinema achieved legitimacy at different times in different countries; thus, France was able to export auteurist ideas and auteurist movies that influenced attitudes in the U.S. because cinema had there, due to differences in national circumstance, become a legitimate form at an earlier date. *Ibid.*, p. 82.

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<sup>496</sup>The term is Baumann’s. *Ibid.*, pp. 21-52.

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<sup>497</sup>For example, on Anchor Bay’s *Aguirre: The Wrath of God* DVD (2000), Werner Herzog is quoted in a biographical extra defending his decision to take a 35mm camera from the Munich Film School by saying “I knew it was not theft . . . I had a natural right to take it”—presumably because he made a number of masterpieces, including his 1972 film *Aguirre*, with that camera.

<sup>497</sup>See, for example, Nick James, "The Gummo Factor," *Sight & Sound*, vol. 20, no. 1 (January 2010), p. 5.

498

<sup>498</sup>To understand this topic in the context of American independent cinema, see James Schamus's classic article, "To the Rear of the Back End: The Economics of Independent Cinema," *Contemporary Hollywood Cinema*, ed. Steve Neale and Murray Smith (New York: Routledge, 1998), pp. 97-105.

499

<sup>499</sup>Tony Marsiglia, "RE: Some Questions," personal e-mails to the author (September 2004), pp. 1-5. Again, this is not unusual—and even Biller is content to label herself a "highbrow" and a "snob." Anna Biller, "RE: Hi David," personal emails to the author (November 2009), pp. 3, 6.

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<sup>500</sup>Geoffrey Nowell-Smith, "Art Cinema," *The Oxford History of World Cinema*, ed. Geoffrey Nowell-Smith (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996), p. 567.

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<sup>501</sup>For more on mumblecore, see Samuel B. Prime, "A Generation of Filmmakers Influenced By Whom?: Tracing the Origin of Mumblecore, the New American Independent Film Movement," unpublished conference paper (St. Louis: Popular Culture Association Conference; April 1, 2010), pp. 1-9.

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<sup>502</sup>Nowell-Smith, "Art Cinema," p. 567.

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<sup>503</sup>Baumann, *Hollywood Highbrow*, p. 177.

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<sup>504</sup>Manohla Dargis, "Seduction by Machine Gun," *The New York Times*, July 1, 2009. Available at <<http://movies.nytimes.com/2009/07/01/movies/01enemies.html?8dpc>>. Accessed July 1, 2009.

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<sup>505</sup>See for example Dave Izkoff, "The Man Behind the Dreamscape," *The New York Times*, June 30, 2010. Available at <[http://www.nytimes.com/2010/07/04/movies/04inception.html?\\_r=1&hpw](http://www.nytimes.com/2010/07/04/movies/04inception.html?_r=1&hpw)>. Accessed July 3, 2010. Izkoff discusses Christopher Nolan as "a blockbuster auteur."

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<sup>506</sup>Baumann, *Hollywood Highbrow*, p. 88.

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<sup>507</sup>Twenty-six German filmmakers, "The Oberhausen Manifesto" (1962), *The European Cinema*, ed. Catherine Fowler (London: Routledge, 2002), p. 73. See also Lars von Trier and Thomas Vinterberg, "Dogme 95—The Vow of Chastity" (1995), *The European Cinema Reader*, ed. Catherine Fowler (London: Routledge, 2002), p. 83.

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<sup>508</sup>See Jonas Mekas, "The First Statement of the New American Cinema Group," September 30, 1962. Posted on the Film-Makers' Cooperative website. <<http://www.film-makerscoop.com/history.htm>>. Accessed 4 April 2009.

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<sup>509</sup>Newman expands the arguments of his *Cinema Journal* article in his wonderful book *Indie: An American Film Culture* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2011).

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<sup>510</sup>Newman, "Indie Culture: In Pursuit of the Authentic Autonomous Alternative," *Cinema Journal* vol. 48, no. 3 (Spring 2009), p. 16.

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<sup>511</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 17.

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<sup>512</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 34.

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<sup>513</sup>Producers in the least profitable markets like avant-garde film have often funded themselves through grants or teaching. But by funding themselves this way, experimentalists and other "indie" filmmakers are selling their status to institutions in return for money. Indeed, even if they were to turn entirely ascetic by simply granting their works to institutions while refusing even indirect profits from

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them, they would still be circulating their art movies within a commodity system wherein the rarity of objects classified as “art” offers commercial value to institutions and a cultural status to insiders.

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¶Newman, “Indie Culture,” p. 17.

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¶For the finest discussion of Hollywood’s impact on foreign films, see Tino Balio, *The Foreign Film Renaissance on American Screens, 1946-1973* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 2010).

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¶See Justin Wyatt, “The Formation of the ‘Major Independent’: Miramax, New Line and the New Hollywood,” *Contemporary Hollywood Cinema*, ed. Steve Neale and Murray Smith (London: Routledge, 1998), pp. 84-86.

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¶As, for example, when the Weinstein-led Miramax famously surrendered the X rating assigned to Peter Greenaway’s *The Cook, The Thief, His Wife, and Her Lover* (1989), distributing it unrated in America after Greenaway refused to cut his film for an R. None of this stopped Miramax from playing both sides of the controversy by publicizing the original rating in its promotional material.

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¶Ironically, this pull-back has also precipitated the conditions under which Disney is now considering selling Miramax back to the Weinsteins. See Michael Cieply, “A Rebuilding Phase for Independent Film,” *New York Times* (April 25, 2010), online edition. Available at <<http://www.nytimes.com/2010/04/26/business/media/26indie.html?hpw>>. Accessed April 27, 2010.

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¶Newman, “Indie Culture,” p. 17.

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¶Newman, “Indie Culture,” p. 17.

## NOTES TO CHAPTER THIRTEEN

## Chapter Twelve / Conclusion

### *Art Cinema, the Distribution Theory*

Though film studies has come a long way since the heyday of the auteur theory in the 1960s and 1970s, the field still circulates many auteur biases. Such biases are evident in what I call “the bad old story” of movie distribution, which amounts to any anecdote that presents distributors as money-grubbing philistines who interfere with the activities of cinematic artists, especially auteurs. Because this interference is usually imagined as happening *after* production has been finished, distributors often come off even worse in this sort of story than executive producers, whose overlapping (and frequently identical) financial functions seem to enable the creative process in a more direct way.<sup>521</sup> Hence, the legend in which Joseph Levine lets Jean-Luc Godard know that an early cut of *Le mépris* (1963) doesn’t have “enough ass in it” represents an iconic embodiment of the bad old story, for in it an American distributor crudely directs a French auteur to modify an art film that the auteur considered finished so that it would generate more cash.<sup>522</sup> But there

are so many other noteworthy cases—here we need only mention Harvey Weinstein to confirm the point—that we needn’t limit ourselves to Levine and Godard. In its elements, the bad old story is inscribed, it seems, in our very brains.<sup>523</sup>

What we may be more surprised to discover is that variants of this story are today often used to *grease* movie distribution. Art-cinema industries promote films and auteurs by defending their authenticity through anti-distribution narratives like the bad old story. At times, this means that distributors must voluntarily fill the role of the heavy to further their own interests, which are tied to those of the auteurs whose work they distribute. For example, Weinstein has shown a consistent willingness to play the vulgarian villain, and it is tempting to think that he understands that doing so has made the art movies of “pure” auteurs like Peter Greenaway more valuable to his distribution labels; a similar dynamic is visible in the dealings of major-studio distributors like Universal and Warner Brothers with directors like Todd Solondz or Stanley Kubrick. All in all, it seems that the bad old story is today a conventional component of art-cinema distribution, from mainstream art cinema to the avant-garde. But the idea of art-cinema distribution that this use of the anecdote suggests is so peculiar that it cannot be explored through traditional ideas alone. It forces us to find a nuanced way of imagining distribution, one that sees it as something more than a pipeline for movies run by distribution agents.

The pipeline idea, which I call “the transit metaphor,” is the most traditional idea of distribution available. Its virtue is clarity, and the cost of such clarity is nuance. If our models are to draw on complex variables like cultural status, high-art concepts, etc., we must develop a more flexible, extended definition of distribution that encompasses a greater number of elements and has a broader set of applications. For me, an extended

definition construes distribution not as a mere pipeline but as a shifting segment in a wider, more interactive network of cultural exchange. The advantage of this model is that it helps us re-imagine a movie-distribution industry that interfaces with many different cultural “flows,” all of which may ultimately have an impact on art-cinema form. In this way, the network model avoids the de-contextualization that makes it seem as if movies are circulated outside a dense fabric of social relations—an illusion that is quite vivid in discussions of art cinema, whose primary discourses encourage it. Clearly, the extended definition must be treated with care, for it could lead us into the conceptual ether. But we don’t have a choice as to whether to use it, for the realities of movie distribution—and the striking peculiarities of art-cinema distribution—mandate it. And in the end, the extended definition has one other major advantage as well: it encourages theorists to re-imagine art cinema as an active, collective, super-generic category of high art.

#### From the Transit Metaphor to an Extended Definition

To re-conceive art-cinema distribution, we should review how the topic of movie distribution been dealt with in the past. The bad old story is one popular approach. But a more neutral approach to distribution has long been available in the vast literature of the movie business. Here the routine way of conceptualizing distribution has been to imagine it as a highway, bridge, or pipeline. For example, industry analyst Harold Vogel manages to combine all three metaphors when he observes that “[o]wnership of entertainment distribution capability is like ownership of a toll road or bridge. No matter how good or bad the software product . . . is, it must pass over or cross through a distribution pipeline in order to reach the consumer.”<sup>524</sup> This conventional view of distribution—which deems the distributor a “local monopolist,” as Vogel puts it—has definite utility, for it explains why certain cinemas have proved viable in certain contexts.

Examples of this idea of distribution may be found in textbooks like *The Movie Business Book* (1983/2004) and in popular studies such as Edward Jay Epstein’s *The Big Picture: The New Logic of Money and Power in Hollywood* (2005). For instance, the first book contains a chapter entitled “Theatrical Distribution,” by Warner Brothers executive Daniel Fellman, and another chapter entitled “Independent Distribution,” by Newmarket Films executive Bob Berney.<sup>525</sup> In overviews such as these, movie distribution is always a question of acquisition (that is, distributor-producer relations) or of dissemination (that is, distributor-exhibitor relations). These topics cover issues like pickup deals, financing, licensing, horizontal integration, changes in technology, test screening for playability, and advertising and marketability. Thus, distribution is construed here almost exclusively in terms of issues that affect *distributors* and *distribution agents*, i.e., the companies and people who transport movies from the artists to the exhibitors and on to consumers. Even

in looking at the circulation of art-house movies, these pieces remain focused on business activities that gain a good profit by conveying movies from producers to consumers while experiencing minimal friction from *distribution constraints*.

Historians and critics have drawn useful information from these business guides. This utility is reflected in the fine work of scholars like Thomas Guback, Justin Wyatt, Tino Balio, etc.<sup>526</sup> Unfortunately, the transit metaphor has its limitations. We can use it to imagine distribution as speeding movies toward viewers; we can even use it to imagine distribution speeding dollars back to distributors in a feedback loop. But this metaphor cannot account for the interactive networks of social exchange that movie distribution has actually helped energize in the world. Nor can it make sense of the cinema's place in wider circuits of human circulation, where biological as well as sociological materials are exchanged. Indeed, if flows of prestige, fame, ambition, sexual desire, and cinephilia could somehow be added to the transit metaphor, it might be easier for film scholars to justify the application of this metaphor to a sexy, status-laden highbrow movie genre like art cinema. However, the transit metaphor depends on the ready economic quantification of variables and is too brittle to support such an approach.

Today, more supple and holistic concepts of distribution are emerging in a variety of subfields. These ideas seem especially popular in the scholarship on world cinema and “the transnational,” where ideas of exchange and interdependence are taken for granted.<sup>527</sup> They are also popular among media scholars like Sean Cubitt who are versed in ideas of communication. Many of these new concepts of movie distribution define their topic broadly and loosely,<sup>528</sup> making distribution a richer, more culturally relevant topic—but also making it more difficult for theorists to use such concepts systematically.

That said, there is a tradition in the sociology of art that uses an extended definition in a systematic way. This tradition begins with the work of Howard Becker.

In “Distributing Art Works,” a chapter in his landmark book *Art Worlds* (1982), Becker lays out principles relevant to art worlds both high and low.<sup>529</sup> Becker’s book is organized by his belief that all “artistic work, like all human activity, involves the joint activity of a number, often a large number, of people”—and this idea is nowhere truer than in the area of distribution.<sup>530</sup> Becker perceives the “joint activity” of art as leading naturally to the creation of art worlds. These distribution contexts “provide distribution systems which integrate artists into their society’s economy, bringing art works to publics which appreciate them and will pay enough so that the work can proceed.”<sup>531</sup> Subject to pressures and laws, these distribution contexts are hardly autonomous. Before people can organize an art world justified by making and distributing “objects or events defined as art, they need sufficient political and economic freedom to do that, and not all societies provide it.”<sup>532</sup> Even in cultures where organized art worlds already exist, the capacity to make and distribute art is never divided equally. Almost from the start, then, we see that art—*all* art, whether popular or “fine”—amounts to an active process of social exchange. We also see that the phenomenon that we call “distribution” is a specialized example of that active social exchange. And finally, we see that both kinds of social exchange remain contingent on broader cultural factors, like political freedom.

Though Becker makes many fine points, the most crucial may be his belief that “[d]istribution has a crucial effect on [artist] reputations. What is not distributed is not known and thus cannot be well thought of or have historical importance.”<sup>533</sup> Hoping to reach an audience and looking out for their own fame, status, and survival, artists respond

to the needs of a delivery system by introducing elements of standardization into their artworks that Becker calls “marks of the system.” This distribution system fits in turn into a larger distribution context and the overall cultural system that shapes it; a distribution system has only as much leeway to accommodate artist and audience preferences as the broader systems allow.<sup>534</sup> Most artists accept the constraints of their distribution system, but some artists attempt to reshape those constraints by overpowering that system through their own marketability or by leaguizing with other artists to inaugurate new distribution systems. Other collective factors, such as art traditions, audience expectations, linguistic backgrounds, political trends, changes in technology, and market segmentations, are in play here, as are many people, some all but invisible, who shape a work and bring it to its public—including that public, whose desires mold the works and are in turn molded by them. In sum, what Becker indicates is that neither artists, nor works, nor audiences are autonomous—and distribution is what ties them together.

Where do audiences for new categories of art come from? Today, theorists take it for granted that, as Jane Root once put it, movie distributors “are a vital link in the chain between film production and audiences,” for distributors “decide what can be shown where and . . . make crucial decisions about a film’s public profile.”<sup>535</sup> But what if no audience for a given category of cinema exists? How does one coalesce and emerge? Does someone make it? Theorists who rely on the transit metaphor might struggle with this sort of question, since distributors and directors seem to be their only candidates. But in his book *Hollywood Highbrow: From Entertainment to Art* (2007), Shyon Baumann shows us that complex social processes are responsible for the formation of audiences. To my knowledge, only Baumann has applied Becker’s ideas and those of the sociology of

art to the art-cinema category. One of the advantages of his research is that it allows us to see that before art movies could have a broad success in the postwar U.S., high-art and film-as-high-art concepts had to be circulating there already.

Before focusing on Hollywood, Baumann traces the broad “historical change in the perception of films” that allowed the cinema to be legitimated as art in different times and places.<sup>536</sup> His goal is to explain how one strain of art cinema, the New Hollywood, came to be regarded as high art in the 1970s, a curious phenomenon given Hollywood’s great popularity before 1950 and its industrial efforts to be perceived as a purveyor of entertainment, not art. To explain this curiosity, Baumann starts by describing several factors, like the early appearance of the film-as-high-art idea in France and Italy as well as Hollywood’s use of the auteur theory and other high-art concepts to combat its long decline beginning in the 1950s. Thus, he sets up a three-part “legitimation framework” to account for the gradual change in cultural perceptions of Hollywood.<sup>537</sup> His most crucial insight is his idea that the cultural acceptance of “*foreign films as art acted as a pathway for the legitimation of the art world for Hollywood films.*”<sup>538</sup> That the film-as-high-art idea originally hailed from Europe added to its legitimacy in Hollywood and gave it status-conferring power there; this legitimacy was then reinforced by the success of other ideas of European provenance, especially the auteur theory.

The thing that I most admire about Baumann’s account is that it acknowledges that the idea of “Hollywood art cinema” is just that: a concept, an idea. The development and circulation of this idea was spurred by global forces of exchange that encouraged the creation of cognitive pathways that let the film-as-high-art idea penetrate the U.S. Unlike most commercial movie categories, art cinema has been reliant on its organizing concept,

for the category is entirely subjective, intellectual. It cannot be unified by objective forms like the frontier backdrop of the western. The high-art concept is, then, all that stands between art movies and categorical chaos. The circulation of the film-as-high-art idea was, as Baumann shows, expanded by postwar phenomena, like the rapid stratification of consumer culture, the huge expansion of the educational system, the emergence of an increasingly expert class of film critics, and the precipitous decline in the popularity of film as entertainment. In other words, though the circulation of art cinema's high-art idea was impeded by many historical factors before the middle of the century, many of those impediments were removed after the Second World War.

It is easy to see how this kind of account might be expanded. If Baumann were to dispense with the social-constructionist premises that orient not only his study but many research programs in the social sciences, he could expand his sociology into biocultural areas, perhaps by speculating on how the circulation of New Hollywood films dovetailed with the evolutionary and specifically sexual impulses of "human nature." In other words, distribution paradigms might ultimately account for our physiological and biocultural constraints as well our cultural, subcultural, and industrial constraints.<sup>539</sup> But before we delve this possibility too deeply, we should come up for oxygen, as it were. We have traveled a long way in a short period, moving from the bad old story and a brittle transit metaphor to a diffuse idea of distribution as "biocultural circulation." We should review what we have learned and apply it before we go further.

First, art is a collective human activity that takes place within a material art world. Because it is collective and material, art is never "free." Some of its constraints operate at the level of cultural politics while others are subcultural, operating through various art

worlds. An even narrower level of constraint is industrial. Professional artists who want to improve their standing must exhibit their work institutionally, which in the cinema means they must get industrial distribution. Such distribution is never divided equally, so its acquisition is a competitive process in which artists strive at once to distinguish their work and standardize the same in accord with the constraints of a delivery system. This process entails that artists must work within art categories or art ideas that are accessible to audiences targeted by their delivery system; their individual contribution is limited by the flexibility of those categories, ideas, and systems. Often, the most elastic organizing concepts, like “high art,” are simply unavailable within a given art world due to cultural, subcultural, and industrial factors. Such categories and ideas emerge in art worlds only gradually, in concert with other historical developments.

Throughout the arts, distribution agents have considerable power, but this power is limited. As “middle men,” distributors must negotiate layers of constraint: some that are put in place by the culture, which usually endorses a degree of censorship; some that are put in place by the art world, whose audiences are limited in what they want or can accept; some that are put in place by the industry, which relies on fixed constraints to optimize the overall profitability of a delivery system; and some that are put in place by the categories of artwork they work with, categories that often mandate particular and even peculiar promotional activities. In art cinema, one peculiar tactic is distributors’ use of the bad old story, whose anti-distributor trajectory would seem a counterintuitive tool for a distributor to use were it not for art cinema’s high-art bases.

### The Bad Old Story and Subcultural Status

Art cinema is built on a high-art concept that first developed and thrived through capitalist forces. As the product of labor innovations that disrupted art markets after the Renaissance, this concept was a defensive response to market constraints. What made this idea peculiar as a capitalist tool was that it denied the relevance of the market and of all commercial concerns. Given this background, it is less surprising that a high-art sector of the cinema has consistently—and always implausibly—aspired to get beyond commerce. And it is almost predictable that distributors, who more than anyone represent commerce, are the most reviled figures in art cinema. This revulsion against distributors is one way in which the purity of auteurs is thrown into relief, much as art cinema’s purity ostensibly stands out against the corrupted mainstream. But we should also see that in this equation distributors represent exchange and collaboration, things that would not automatically be condemned were it not for a high-art framework that idealizes individualism, autonomy, and anti-commercial purity. That these industrial agents use this negative rhetoric is a function of their place in art cinema—and it is intriguing that they have learned to use it in a way that foments that which this rhetoric superficially rejects, industrial distribution. Indeed, between Levine’s time and ours, distributors like Weinstein have often used such rhetoric to promote their movies. As a result, the mechanics of the bad old story are worth scrutinizing, especially as they relate to subcultural status.

One striking use of the bad old story occurred in the hoopla around the release of Todd Solondz’s *Happiness* (1998), a \$3,000,000 art film produced in the indie sector by Good Machine through a distribution agreement with October Films, then a boutique division of Universal. According to this anecdote, when a Universal executive screened this award-winning indie film, he was so upset by a masturbation scene that he “ordered

October to dump *Happiness* from its slate.”<sup>540</sup> After this information got out, Solondz’s status in indie sectors actually rose, partly because his spat with the studio and the MPAA resulted in an unrated, indie release of his film.<sup>541</sup> But as Michael Z. Newman reports, the problem with this parable is that Universal also gave Good Machine “under the table” financing so *Happiness* could get proper distribution. When this detail leaked, Solondz’s reputation suffered. “Solondz had autonomy precisely because he stood up to Universal,” Newman notes.<sup>542</sup> So the “fact his film was distributed with the help of the studio’s dirty money is an inconvenient detail,” one that has been left out of conventional accounts that accept the notion of Solondz’s autonomy at face value.

If we accept the fact that a professional artist is at some level a businessman who must conduct his or her business through systems of constraint, we might conclude that the only problem for Solondz was that the story leaked. He could not cut his film for the studio if he wanted to maintain his “cred.” But his cred wouldn’t do him much good if his film was not seen. As for Universal, its decision to give Good Machine a secret loan was the best way to navigate its many constraints. The studio had to defend its family-friendly image and maintain its status as an upstanding member of the MPAA; at the same time, it wanted to defend its interest in October and *Happiness*, whose publicity would have gone south had it muscled through cuts. By distancing itself from a provocateur, accepting the bad indie press that resulted, and financing the release of *Happiness* privately, Universal put itself in a win-win position, for it managed to protect its family-oriented reputation while also increasing its profits from its indie investment.

This story tells us that an auteur’s subcultural status hinges on perceptions of his or her autonomy as an author of a film. Though indie auteurs like Solondz must make

compromises large and small when producing a movie, they must keep those realities out of the public eye to keep their subcultural status (and their movies) flowing. Indie cred amounts to an indie auteur's symbolic capital. When it is as strong as Solondz's was after the success of *Welcome to the Dollhouse* (1995), it implies a following that can cement the auteur's reputation over the long-term. These considerations are of economic import, for they can convince investors to back future projects. It is no wonder, then, that an indie auteur's apparent independence from corporate backers is a crucial illusion. Still, it is not so crucial that an auteur would automatically abandon his or her distribution for it, since distribution is also crucial to an indie auteur's reputation. Solondz was, in other words, in a tricky position once Universal, a corporate distributor that was itself caught in a tricky web of relations, began to back away from his film.

This story also confirms Becker's belief that the "interests of the intermediaries who operate distribution systems frequently differ from those of the artists whose work they handle."<sup>543</sup> Distributors have a hard time sharing the prestige that is the main benefit of this category for its other participants, including artists and audiences. Indeed, *inside* art cinema,<sup>544</sup> the distributor position is largely a thankless one unless distributors manage to brand themselves, *à la* Daniel Talbot in a former era or James Schamus in our own, as indie operators with an "authentic" feel for art—and even this careful positioning could backfire if distributors were to disclose commercial ambitions. Consider for a moment that Weinstein has done more for art cinema in the U.S. than any auteur, yet he is widely reviled in indie circles as an anti-art figure and openly mocked as "Harvey Scissorhands." Granted, Weinstein has reportedly done his share of unattractive things.<sup>545</sup> But by itself, the fact that his distribution labels, especially Miramax, enlarged the circulation of indie

movies and world cinema in the U.S., re-establishing art cinema's mainstream circulation through Hollywood distribution, testifies to his deep cultural impact—a legacy that might have offset his indiscretions had he been an auteur like Godard.

These dynamics have global applications. They explain the scorn that has greeted distributors when they have crossed auteurs like Greenaway or Donald Cammell.<sup>546</sup> And they explain the scorn that has greeted the distributors of French, German, Hungarian, and Chinese auteurs who have done the same. Moreover, this logic is applicable across art cinema's cultural stratifications, encompassing both avant-garde and cult regions. For instance, while running the New York Film-Makers' Coop—the non-profit distribution system that helped spread the film-cooperative movement across the globe, stimulating experimental production as never before—Jonas Mekas endured the animosity of artists like Jack Smith, who painted him as a commercially minded empire-builder.<sup>547</sup> And in a radically different market niche, softcore auteur Alexander Gregory Hippolyte expressed displeasure at the distributors who limited his creativity.<sup>548</sup> In contexts high and low, then, distributors have found it difficult to seem like anything more than profit-seeking “middle men.” It is no wonder that the impossible, self-defeating dream of indie cinema and art cinema broadly is to eliminate distributors from the equation.

So why would distributors want to participate in art cinema? Clearly, they have commercial incentives—for as Roman Lobato has noted, distribution *is* where the money is.<sup>549</sup> Unlike artists and viewers, distributors have direct access to art cinema's economic capital if not its symbolic capital. Then again, art cinema is hardly the most lucrative kind of cinema to distribute. But there is another commercial incentive to consider here, too. Art cinema is very flexible, for distributors can use its myths of value and the “free pass”

they yield to minimize friction from distribution constraints like rating systems, national borders, cultural norms, etc. that would block the flow of genres lacking its prestige. This is what has made art cinema's markers so attractive to distributors in genre-branded areas where the circulation of certain vehicles might be stanchied if they didn't come with art-oriented stylization and auteurist publicity. Indeed, it is relatively easy for distributors to enhance the flow of the movies they are distributing by promoting them as "art" movies, a practice that usually includes auteur promotions that focus on form, on festival awards, and on authenticity-based parables like the bad old story.

### The Influence of Distribution on Art Cinema Form

The main thing that auteurs complain about within or through the bad old story is having to modify their movies to suit distributors. At the rhetorical level, auteurs resist such demands or at least cast them in a very negative light—but it is safe to conclude that distributors have often succeeded in having their demands met, as Levine did to a certain extent with *Le mépris*. In other sectors, this type of influence is not cause for alarm. For instance, when studying softcore, I came across a variety of distributor effects on movie form. Thus, I saw examples in the 1990s softcore industry of executive producers being instructed by their distributors to tone down the violence and sexism of their softcore so as to bring it into line with the postfeminist prescriptions of late-night-cable distribution. This influence helped reform the wild, misogynist genre known in the 1960s and 1970s as "sexploitation" into the tamer, more female-friendly softcore of the 1990s. Because softcore is (wrongly) perceived as a non-auteurist category, scholars and insiders alike seemed uninhibited by aestheticist bias and were thus fairly open about the influence of

distributors on actual movies. But in art cinema, this influence has been underreported, often because of this category's strict ideals of authorship.

On the other hand, this super-genre emerges through all genres, so in studying softcore I did observe examples of distribution's influence on the form of softcore *art* movies. This influence was not always a product of outside demands—for as Becker has noted, the main way distribution affects form is through the internalized desires of artists, who standardize their works to win distribution in the most prestigious contexts available. One interesting example of this effect involved Radley Metzger. In the 1960s and 1970s, American sexploitation auteurs such as Metzger added highbrow content to their films, hoping to play all the theatrical circuits open to sexualized films, including art houses as well as drive-ins and grindhouses. The presence of art-house forms and styles in their films won these auteurs a measure of cultural distinction, which insulated them from litigation even as the grindhouse content ensured audience appeal. These processes were even more feasible if the director was like Metzger his or her own distributor as well and was willing to ape famous European auteurs (whose techniques Metzger understood due to his former employment at Janus Films). Though this commercial strategy could result in these directors being condemned as inauthentic, middlebrow interlopers by highbrow critics,<sup>550</sup> such a result was in some milieus taken as proof of prestige, for it meant these directors were being reviewed by “serious” critics.

On finishing my softcore study, I was no longer certain that the European auteurs whom the sexploitation auteurs had aped had been immune to distribution pressures. After all, as Becker puts it, art works “always bear the marks of the system which distributes them,”<sup>551</sup> and it was reasonable to assume that traditional art films were marked by their

distribution no less than softcore art movies, albeit differently. Nor was I still certain that there was anything wrong with such pressures and their “marks,” since it seemed unlikely that a communal system of distribution could exist without them. It was then that I came to assume that the basic difference between the two areas relative to distribution was not the *fact* of its effect on form, which could not be avoided, but that legitimate art cinemas put subcultural pressure on insiders to talk about this effect in certain ways, as if the cost of this sort of legitimacy was intellectual freedom. One obvious result of this subcultural pressure was the bad old story, which often serves to exculpate auteurs for the inevitable formal impact of commercial distribution on their movies.

Scholars studying art cinema outside crossover forums have moved beyond the bad old story, though rarely in a self-conscious way that allows them to dispense with this aestheticist “common sense.” The tendency of this scholarship is to interpret form and production in terms of distribution and exhibition. For example, Rosalind Galt and Karl Schoonover’s collection *Global Art Cinema: New Theories and Histories* (2010) includes many excellent pieces that utilize distribution-based methods. These include Sharon Hayashi’s article on “pink art cinema,” which looks at transformations in a culturally debased kind of Japanese sex film through its exchanges with the global festival circuit; Azadeh Farahmand’s essay on Iranian cinema, which examines how this national cinema emerged as an acclaimed art cinema through changes in Iranian politics and its creators’ use of tactics accessible to festival-goers; Randall Halle’s essay on transnational funding, which considers how European financing “exoticized” films made outside Europe for European consumption; and, finally, Betz’s article on the persistence of the “parametric” tradition in global art cinema and the festival circuit of today.<sup>552</sup>

Four generalities may be extracted from these pieces, all of which should sound familiar to students of Becker. First, cinema is a joint activity that reflects a wide array of human interactions over time. Second, movie distribution exerts an influence over the formation of movie categories, movie form, and the subcultural status of movie insiders like auteurs. Third, when films circulate in new milieus, they often seem very new—for they are received in new ways. The last two points are especially striking in Hayashi's essay, which shows a movie (Koji Wakamatsu's *Secrets Behind the Wall* [1965]) and an entire strain of cult production circulating out of the illegitimate world of "subcinema" into the legitimate world of global art cinema through a shift to festival distribution—a phenomenon that recalls how Metzger once outfitted his softcore art movies to circulate through art houses and grindhouses. According to Hayashi, the transformation of the pinks into an art cinema reflected a postwar milieu that featured the Sexual Revolution; the global politics of the postwar era; the decline of the Japanese studio system; and the zest of postwar world audiences to interpret Japanese cinema, *any* Japanese cinema, as art cinema.<sup>553</sup> It also reflected distribution's impact on form.

But if we look, finally, at Betz's article, we will see that distribution pressures can also encourage auteurs like Jia Zhangke, Apichatpong Weerasethakul, Lucrecia Martel, Aleksandr Sokurov, Béla Tarr, or Claire Denis to maintain the traditions of even the most overtly difficult formats.<sup>554</sup> The standardization that Becker saw as an inevitable mark of a delivery system need not, then, be considered in terms of homogenization; it can also be considered in terms of the idiosyncrasy or common difficulty of movies across a given distribution system or market niche. This point is clearer if we turn away from the global festival circuit and look at the alternative circuit of cooperatives, university cinemas, and

microcinemas that have distributed avant-garde cinemas. As Michael Zryd and Kathryn Ramey have shown, this kind of distribution has not only supported experimental cinema but has encouraged the common inaccessibility of works made by filmmakers as different as Stan Brakhage, Joyce Wieland, and Marlon Riggs.<sup>555</sup>

Despite their intriguing methods, these scholars have not produced a materialist theory of distribution whose explanatory potential is rich and portable. One reason for this is that they have not reflected self-consciously on their use of distribution concepts and, as a result, are not always unfriendly to the bad old story themselves. On the other hand, historicist scholars like Anthony McKenna who *are* unfriendly to the bad old story do not always take a wide enough view, and their contextual parameters prevent them from recognizing that the anti-distributor biases of the bad old story are a product of a pervasive high-art ideology that cannot be entirely escaped in art-cinema contexts.<sup>556</sup> In my view, art-cinema insiders cannot really be blamed for circulating such biases, for these biases are a result of their milieu and their faith—but scholars working through peer review *can* be thus blamed, for such biases do not reflect academic ideals of honesty, of truth, or of impartial inquiry. Thus, as I have suggested in a variety of ways in this book, film scholars should maintain clear lines between their work and those of movie critics who are more directly involved in the art-cinema industry.

I would close with two thoughts. One reason that the bad old story bothers me is not that it is predictable and repetitive but that it reduces the ethical context of art movies to questions of auteur integrity. In this narrative, the auteur “wins” if he or she refuses to compromise his or her vision in a way that satisfies the distributor. But moviemaking involves many ethical issues that stretch beyond auteur vision. What if a situation simply

demands the auteur compromise his or her vision, as when the circulation of a movie—whose success the livelihood of an entire cast and crew may well depend on—hinges on an alteration in its “vision”? Thought of in the context of community survival, questions of personal cinema might seem precious, even trivial by comparison. Or what if an auteur vision depends on unethical production habits? As Joan Hawkins argues, low-art movies, often pigeon-holed as exploitative, might well be thought of as *more* ethical than high-art movies if the latter includes works like Yoko Ono’s avant-garde, *cinéma vérité* film *Rape* (1969), with its dubious production history.<sup>557</sup> At the highest levels, art cinema’s free pass has at times extended to production practices, with some auteurs feeling at liberty to cross lines of ordinary ethics in their filmmaking—a phenomenon that is arguably apparent in Godard’s cavalier dealings with Levine, his distributor.

Secondly, if we can as scholars agree that the bad old story is inadequate both as an ethical measure and as an industrial metaphor, how should we supplant it? Perhaps by substituting in its stead a distribution theory that positions the cinema as a value-neutral phenomenon comprised of interactive flows of movies, ideas, and status, which are in turn linked to non-cinematic experience. This sense of inclusivism, interconnectedness, makes such a theory especially useful in revisionary analyses of a privileged super-genre such as art cinema, whose exclusivism is part of its historical identification with high-art ideology. High-art ideology has encouraged critics to see art cinema through its culturally valued parts (e.g., its auteurs, masterworks, styles) and its negative anecdotes (i.e., the bad old story) rather than through its modes of cultural and subcultural circulation, which have interlinked its many parts, regardless of individual judgments of aesthetic value or collective judgments of legitimacy. Hence, when a category like art cinema is subjected

to this fresh distribution approach, something new and odd happens: for once, this super-genre emerges as a whole. Here, art cinema is an evolving human network of cultural and subcultural flows of movie forms, movie concepts, and related types of human capital all unified by the idea of cinema as high art. In the postwar era, these currents have grown ever-more byzantine, characterized by new-wave movements, categorical diversity, and complicated modes of cultural and subcultural exchange.

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<sup>521</sup> This chapter does not make a strict distinction between distributors who are only distributors and those who, like Joseph Levine or Harvey Weinstein, have also acted as producer-distributors.

<sup>522</sup>

□ A.T. McKenna takes issue with Peter Lev's re-telling of this legend. See A.T. McKenna, "Guilty By Association: Joe Levine, European Cinema and the Culture Clash of *Le Mépris*," *Scope* 14 (June 2009): n. p. Available at <<http://www.scope.nottingham.ac.uk/article.php?issue=14&idea=1135>>. Accessed June 17, 2009. See also Peter Lev, *The Euro-American Cinema* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1993), pp. 83-89 (especially p. 88, n. 11).

<sup>523</sup> Indeed, there may be a sense in which the bad old story *is* inscribed in our brains—for it could be that "human nature" and cultural selection have favored the bad old story's high-art prejudice in complex ways. Though this possibility would explain the persistence of such stories, I don't have space for this biocultural speculation in this particular chapter.

<sup>524</sup>

□ Quoted in Tino Balio, "A Major Presence in all of the World's Important Markets": The Globalization of Hollywood in the 1990s," *Contemporary Hollywood Cinema*, ed. Steve Neale and Murray Smith (London: Routledge, 1998), pp. 61-62.

<sup>525</sup>

□ See Daniel Fellman, "Theatrical Distribution," *The Movie Business Book*, ed. Jason Squire (1983; New York: Fireside, 2004), pp. 362-374; and Bob Berney, "Independent Distribution," *The Movie Business Book*, ed. Jason Squire (1983; New York: Fireside, 2004), pp. 375-383.

<sup>526</sup>

□ One recent example is Tino Balio's extraordinary book *The Foreign Film Renaissance on American Screens, 1946-1973* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 2010), which contains a wealth of data on art-film distributors in the U.S. in the postwar period.

<sup>527</sup> For example, see Tom O'Regan, "Cultural Exchange," *A Companion to Film Theory*, ed. Toby Miller and Robert Stam (1999; Malden, MA: Blackwell, 2004), pp. 262-294, and Eleftheria Thanouli, "Narration in World cinema: Mapping the flows of formal exchange in the era of globalization," *New Cinemas: Journal of Contemporary Film*, vol. 6, no. 1 (2008), pp. 5-15.

<sup>528</sup>

□ See, for example, Sean Cubitt, "Distribution and Media Flows," *Cultural Politics*, vol. 1, no. 2 (2005), pp. 193-214, and Roman Lobato, "Subcinema: Theorizing Marginal Film Distribution," *Limina: A Journal of Historical and Cultural Studies* vol. 13 (2007), pp. 113-120.

<sup>529</sup>

□ Howard Becker, *Art Worlds* (1982; Berkeley: University of California Press, 2008), pp. 93-130.

<sup>530</sup>

□ Ibid., p. 1.

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Ibid., p. 93.

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Ibid., p. 39.

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Ibid., pp. 94, 95.

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Ibid., p. 39.

535 Jane Root, "Distributing 'A Question of Silence': A Cautionary Tale," *Screen*, vol. 26, no. 6 (1985), p. 58.

536 Shyon Baumann, *Hollywood Highbrow* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2007), p. 1. See also Shyon Baumann, "Intellectualization and Art World Development: Film in the United States," *American Sociological Review* 66 (June 2001), pp. 404-426.

537 Baumann, *Hollywood Highbrow*, p. 3; see also pp. 14, 161.

538 Ibid., p. 113. Baumann's italics.

539

"That is why I have tried to formulate my distribution theory, nascent though it currently is, according to Brian Boyd's belief that an "evolutionary analysis of art [must] consider the costs and benefits of art as a behavior in general." Brian Boyd, "Art and Evolution: The Avant-Garde as Test Case: Spiegelman in *The Narrative Corpse*" (2008), *Evolution, Literature and Film: A Reader*, ed. Brian Boyd, Joseph Carroll, and Jonathan Gottschall (New York: Columbia University Press, 2010), p. 438. A distribution theory measures art behavior in terms of incentives and constraints, so it fits Boyd's prescriptions.

540 Michael Z. Newman, "Indie Culture," p. 24. See also Peter Biskind, *Down and Dirty Dancing: Sundance, Miramax and the Rise of Independent Film* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2004), p. 334.

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Newman, "Indie Culture," pp. 25-26.

542 Ibid., p. 27.

543 Becker, *Art Worlds*, p. 93.

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I am stipulating "inside" because I don't mean to simplify the function of non-economic forms of capital in society. As long as Weinstein is acting outside traditional art-cinema institutions, where art cinema's high-art ethics may be less clearly understood, he can presumably draw on the category's prestige. A good example of this dynamic is his continual use of the Academy Awards to draw positive exposure for himself and his movies in mainstream quarters beyond art-cinema institutions.

545 See Biskind, *Down and Dirty Pictures*.

546 E.g., see Linda Ruth Williams, *The Erotic Thriller in Contemporary Cinema* (Edinburg: Edinburgh University Press, 2005), pp. 404-406.

547 See Paul Arthur, *A Line of Sight: American Avant-Garde Film Since 1965* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2005), pp. 14-16.

548 David Andrews, *The Contemporary Softcore Feature in its Contexts* (Columbus: Ohio State University Press, 2006), p. 143. See similar statements from Playboy softcore director Tom Lazarus. Ibid., pp. 218-220. Low- and ultra-low-budget auteurs like Hippolyte and Lazarus often managed to flout the postfeminist values that dominated their softcore contexts, making movies that would have had little hope of distribution were it not for their stylization and the auteurist rhetoric that surrounded them.

549 Lobato, "Subcinema," p. 115.

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"This happened to Metzger repeatedly. For one expression of such a critique, see Bart Testa, "Soft-Shaft Opportunism: Radley Metzger's Erotic Kitsch," *Spectator* 19.2 (Spring/Summer 1999), pp. 41-55.

<sup>551</sup> Becker, *Art Worlds*, p. 94.

<sup>552</sup> Sharon Hayashi, "The Fantastic Trajectory of Pink Art Cinema From Stalin to Bush," *Global Art Cinema: New Theories and Histories*, ed. Rosalind Galt and Karl Schoonover (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010), pp. 48-61; Azadeh Farahmand, "Disentangling the International Festival Circuit: Genre and Iranian Cinema," *Global Art Cinema: New Theories and Histories*, ed. Rosalind Galt and Karl Schoonover (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010), pp. 263-281; Randal Halle, "Offering Tales They Want to Hear: Transnational European Film Funding as Neo-Orientalism," *Global Art Cinema: New Theories and Histories*, ed. Rosalind Galt and Karl Schoonover (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010), pp. 303-319; and Mark Betz, "Beyond Europe: On Parametric Transcendence," *Global Art Cinema: New Theories and Histories*, ed. Rosalind Galt and Karl Schoonover (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010), pp. 31-47.

<sup>553</sup> See Hayashi, "Fantastic Trajectory," pp. 49, 59-60.

<sup>554</sup> Betz, "Beyond Europe," pp. 31-33.

<sup>555</sup> See Michael Zryd, "The Academy and the Avant-Garde: A Relationship of Dependence and Resistance," *Cinema Journal* 45. 2 (Winter 2006): pp. 17-42, and Kathryn Ramey, "Between Art, Industry, and Academia: The Fragile Balancing Act of the Avant-Garde Film Community," *Visual Anthropology Review*, 18, 1-2 (2002): pp. 22-36.

<sup>556</sup> See McKenna, "Guilty By Association."

<sup>557</sup> Joan Hawkins, *Cutting Edge: Art-Horror and the Horrific Avant-garde* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2000), p. 139. From Erich von Stroheim, Leni Riefenstahl, and Henri-Georges Clouzot to Stan Brakhage, Béla Tarr, and Vincent Gallo, the history of art cinema is replete with auteurs who have blurred moral distinctions in making their movies—and usually for art's sake.

## Epilogue / Beyond, Before Cinephilia

Cinephilia has had a structuring role in art cinema since the silent era. From that time, the passionate love of "serious" movies and "serious" moviegoing has led to what

Sigmund Freud might have called *the overestimation of the object*—for there could be no art cinema if people could not mystify their experience of *objets d’art* through their own love, their own passionate enthusiasm. Cinephilia went mainstream in the postwar era, when it became synonymous not just with a love of the movies as a medium but with a passion for specific films, particular auteurs, exact movements, and definite experiences. Since then, the cinephile has often been framed as a highbrow who thinks all cinephiles should accept his or her tastes as universally valid. In similar ways, cinephilia has been crucial to the canonical processes that “made” art cinema.

One might then ask why if cinephilia is so crucial I have waited until the epilogue to address it. The reason is that, as a form of love, cinephilia is a fuzzy, even amorphous emotion, one that scholars like me find difficult to quantify or to even verify.<sup>558</sup> But even if cinephilia “cannot,” as Jenna Ng contends, “be fully contained in objective theory,” we can see that this love is connected to one of art cinema’s central institutions, the film festival, and one of its central objects, the festival film.<sup>559</sup> Indeed, at least since the days of André Bazin, the festival network has bound moviegoers into communities of likeminded cinephiles, all ostensibly devoted to the pursuit of those art movies worthy of adulation. What is more, ambitious movies of this sort have signaled the cinephilia of their makers, for we now equate the desire to make aspirational movies with the passion for film once equated with the cinephile filmmakers like François Truffaut or Jean-Luc Godard. This means, in turn, that the experimental art cinemas are cinephile cinemas, too. Indeed, as Kathryn Ramey has documented, “avant-garde filmmakers say that they persist in such economically unviable activity” because of their “professed ‘love’ of the work. Many filmmakers speak about their own production as being somehow inevitable,

what they do because they cannot imagine doing anything else.”<sup>560</sup> The presumptive purity of this kind of love—as clearly verified, it seems, by the pointedly anti-institutional, anti-commercial practices of homegrown experimentalists—confirms its cinematic products as forms of high art. Which is to say, as forms of art cinema.

But if I have done nothing else in this book I hope that I have shown that this self-consciously serious passion is not restricted to the legitimate art cinemas. If cinephilia has grown steadily more mainstream in the postwar era, its objects have in that interval been found within a widening array of contexts, some of which even qualify as “mainstream.” Thus, scholars are beginning to realize that the classic cinephilia ascribed to Bazin and Truffaut in France or Andrew Sarris and Susan Sontag in the U.S. cannot account for all the peculiar forms of cinephilia that have emerged during the postwar era—and since the 1980s in particular, when cult cinema took its current form and one technological change after another began to fracture the marketplace.<sup>561</sup> This democratization of cinephilia has not made it useless to scholars, though. If anything, it has made cinephilia more useful, since we can use it as another index for identifying cult art cinemas, mainstream art cinemas, and world art cinemas (as they emerge, e.g., in the most untraditional national contexts, like the Philippines or Nollywood). Like many aestheticisms, cinephilia is an adaptable affection that can be expressed through subcultural variations while remaining itself: a love of movies that ascribes serious aesthetic value to specific moving images that without us would have no value whatever. These “subcultural variations” quite often resemble each other across art cinema’s subcultures, as the huge diversity of auteurist gestures, anti-commercial attitudes, and value-generating institutions documented above confirm. But even when the political and subcultural *differences* seem paramount, these

relative cinephilias remain at bottom human affections that culminate in ideas of high-art value as applied and credited in specific historical milieus.

In academia, this equivalence is becoming especially clear to scholars interested in both cinephile values and cult values. Thus, in a recent *Cineaste* essay entitled “Cult Film or Cinephilia by any Other Name” (2008), Elena Gorfinkel expresses her “nagging sense that these seemingly distinct forms of cinematic feeling and connoisseurship are in many ways actually one and the same,” leading her to conclude that “the cultist and the cinephile have in the present become indistinguishable from each other.”<sup>562</sup> The evidence for this point of view is clarified in recent books like Jonathan Rosenbaum and Adrian Martin’s *Movie Mutations: The Changing Face of World Cinephilia* (2003) and Marijke de Valck and Malte Hagener’s *Cinephilia: Movies, Love and Memory* (2005) as well as in the dossiers on cinephilia that Gorfinkel and Jonathan Buchsbaum have edited for *Framework* and that Mark Betz has edited for *Cinema Journal*. These collections have brought together essayists who often identify today’s cinephilia as one that explores new areas, that crosses subcultural borders, that builds bridges among diverse communities, whether legitimate or illegitimate.<sup>563</sup> Ergo, the “contemporary cinephile is,” as de Valck and Hagener write, “as much a hunter-gatherer as a merchant-trader, of material goods as well as of personal and collective memories, of reproducible data streams and of unique objects”; this new cinephile “embraces and uses new technology while also nostalgically remembering and caring for outdated media formats.”<sup>564</sup>

Clearly, the sense of cinephilia’s past glory is present in this updated vision of it. Thus, the question that orients the *Framework* dossier—“What is being fought for by today’s cinephilia(s)?”—takes for granted that the cinephiles of the classic new-wave era

were fractious and political, often rushing the barricades over matters of taste and justice, which they saw as intertwined. But what I have taken from these volumes on cinephilia is that no activist idealism is now possible, since cinephiles are too busy establishing a new identity, with many hoping to establish a more pluralist cinephile profile. Cinephiles used to be semi-unified under a vaguely European identity that was politically progressive and culturally highbrow, but the foundations of this unity have since been eroded not just by emerging traditions and by emergent technologies but by a global array of culturalisms, historicisms, poststructuralisms, and postmodernisms that sophisticated cinephiles ignore at their own peril. As a result, cinephiles can no longer present themselves, in Thomas Elsaesser's words, as "the 'happy few'"; they must instead find a way to re-deploy their personal love "for the benefit of the many."<sup>565</sup> Indeed, there is little question, I think, that this new pluralism, which insists not on cinephilia but on cinephilias, is the future. What remains to be seen, though, is whether this odd, aggregate cinephilia—which must be inclusive to be truly pluralist and value-seeking to be truly cinephile—can summon even the partial unity necessary to form a common political front.<sup>566</sup>

At the very least, I hope that in academia this new concept of cinephilia fomenters respect for art cinema's subcultural diversity, allowing academics to see through the processes that have in the past led them to differentiate cult fans (i.e., "fanboys") and mainstream fans ("mass audiences") from the "devotees" of the traditional art cinemas (i.e., "cinephiles" understood as the "happy few," as the elect) through status-heavy labels that tend to reinforce the status quo rather than simply to explain it. This respect seems most possible in the academy because its tolerance is, at least in theory, a function

of its institutional respect for logic and peer review. And make no mistake: when it comes to cinephilia, pluralism has an ironclad logic to its credit.

We can see the force of this logic if we look at examples of the debates now being conducted among cinephiles, traditional and untraditional. These debates were quickened by the 1996 publication of Sontag's essay "The Decay of Cinema," which lamented the passing of a "certain taste"—and a certain kind of cinephile—from the cultural scene.<sup>567</sup> Of course, this polemical essay overstates the matter somewhat, for classic cinephiles like Jonathan Rosenbaum still have prominent platforms to publicize their tastes. Rosenbaum has often written about cinephilia as a force that in effect dislodged him from academia, sending him back to journalism. According to Rosenbaum, "academic film studies have soured much of cinephilia because of its anti-art biases."<sup>568</sup> Of course, Rosenbaum means not anti-*art* but anti-*high-art*—and I would quarrel even with this perspective, given my view that the academy has been responsible for circulating and promoting a great deal of aestheticist ideology and auteurist rhetoric. But Rosenbaum is correct to see that in its ideals the academy *is* anti-high-art—for its respect for logic and peer review *should* make it impervious to the biases of "the 'happy few'." But if the academy's analytic potential gives cinephiles justifiable pause, this is no excuse for them to collect their marbles and go home—unless, of course, they insist on having their own tastes exclusively prioritized at the cultural level. For one positive effect of the academy's analytic potential is that it can make room for many tastes, many cinephilias—leading to an impure, "promiscuous" cinephilia that scholar Lucas Hilderbrand sees as opening cinephiles to new technologies, new experiences, allowing us "to love more of the cinema."<sup>569</sup>

Another component of contemporary cinephilia that Rosenbaum deplores is its Internet orientation.<sup>570</sup> There is an obvious institutional explanation for his dislike of this new dynamic: print critics are being rapidly displaced by Internet critics who find readers through websites, blogs, chatrooms, user reviews, and cyber “top tens.” But the deeper reason for Rosenbaum’s aversion to this new dynamic may be that the Internet, like many modern technologies, has been a leveler of expertise, one that has made it more possible for “mere” fans to attain impressive authority. Thus, the expertise that Rosenbaum has spent his life amassing is not always recognized on the Internet, much as his cinephilia brings no necessary distinction within the academy. Variations on Rosenbaum’s gripe may be found in Gerald Peary’s *For the Love of Movies: The Story of American Film Criticism* (2009). As this documentary shows, print critics have been fighting a rearguard action to retain rights to the cinephile label as part of their larger battle against the forces of technological and economic change. This is a lost cause, in my view, and one whose terms actually highlight the arbitrary nature of the cultural authority that print critics have long enjoyed. For instance, when this movie surveys traditional critics to determine their qualifications, the best they can come up with is their *love of movies* and *the knowledge generated by that love*. Yet this documentary also frames their Internet competitors as cinephiles of a certain age, of a certain background, of a certain sensibility—and captures the print critics often trying to salvage their own positions themselves by pointing to their competitors’ *lack* of qualifications and *lack* of standards.

I am with Hilderbrand, not Rosenbaum. In fact, I am not even sure that art cinema has *any* proprietary right to cinephilia—not even after we expand our notion of the genre to include all the untraditional art cinemas and all the untraditional cinephiles who love

them. After all, what is it that we love about art movies? That they excite our bodies. That they fill us with horror, sympathy, outrage. That they drive us to political or intellectual insight. That they offer dazzling experiences full of richness and light. That they tie our brains in knots. That they fill us with an idealism that binds us to others. Something of all this power was suggested recently when Danish auteur Lars von Trier criticized his own film *Antichrist* (2009) by claiming it was “too beautiful overall.”<sup>571</sup> (This is a “danger” of the category, apparently.) But once we have admitted that the least traditional forms of art cinema have these powers, too, we probably should not rest on our laurels, feeling smug about our new, our more defensible hold on the cinephile label (and status). For the fact is that *any* movie can trigger this set of human reactions, not just one that has, through the auteurist gestures and the value-generating institutions that structure art cinema, attained the cultural or subcultural status of “art movie.” Because our cinephilias often gain shape through these gestures and institutions, it is easy to forget that our ability to love can latch onto *any* movie. This ability does not need to conform to a cinephilia that is recognizably traditional or untraditional. Our love of cinema can, then, be unnamed and unjustified. It can be that movie love that is beyond, before cinephilia.

Perhaps my message will gain in authenticity if I confess that I am a cinephile, and a lapsed traditionalist at that. I have loved movies since boyhood, but I felt the first stirrings of an articulate cinephilia at Cornell University, where the college theater and local art houses gave me glimpses of what that feeling could mean. Later on, I did my graduate work at Stony Brook, which had the university theaters, the art houses, and the access to New York City to recommend it—and whose video collections allowed me to school myself on art-house classics. A few years later, I saw Hal Hartley’s *Henry Fool*

(1997) in New York after a bizarre taxi ride that I remember vividly even though I left the theater so exuberant that I can't remember the ride home. Soon after, I placed my first peer-reviewed article in *Film Criticism*—and it was on Hartley, not the literary auteurs who were the focus of my dissertation. Later still, in Chicago, I had access to more art houses, university theaters, museums, and DIY spaces—and it was there I viewed David Lynch's *Mulholland Drive* (2001) for the first of two dozen times. My passion generated another article, this one in *The Journal of Film and Video*.

But, during that same year, my enthusiasm also drew me to cult cinema: and lo, a book popped out. And now another. My cinephilia is only expanding. I still feel the joy felt at Cornell—it is just that there is, in Hilderbrand's words, *more of it*. That is why I have never regretted this project, which has made me familiar with so many unfamiliar movies, movements, and auteurs. And it is why I tried to watch at least one movie a day while performing the labors associated with this project. It is even why I persisted in this discipline long after it became clear that my method would allow me to refer to no more than a small portion of the artists and movies dazzling my eyes and ears, mind and body, each night from 7 to 11 pm.<sup>572</sup> Love works in mysterious ways.

## NOTES TO EPILOGUE

<sup>572</sup>To cite just two examples, please see Jenna Ng, "Love in a Time of Transcultural Fusion: Cinephilia, Homage and *Kill Bill*," *Cinephilia: Movies, Love and Memory*, ed. Marijke de Valck and Malte Hagener (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2005), p. 75; and Kathryn Ramey, "Between Art, Industry, and Academia: The Fragile Balancing Act of the Avant-Garde Film Community," *Visual Anthropology Review* 18.1-2 (2002), p. 35n.1.

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<sup>559</sup> Ng, "Love in a Time of Transcultural Fusion," p. 75. Ng makes a similar point in Jenna Ng, "The Myth of Total Cinephilia," *Cinema Journal* 49.2 (Winter 2010), p. 151. The importance of festivals to the experience of cinephilia is often cited by participants in the recent cinephilia debates; see, e.g., Liz Czach, "Cinephilia, Stars, and Film Festivals," *Cinema Journal* 49.2 (Winter 2010), pp. 139-145.

<sup>560</sup> Ramey, "Between Art, Industry, and Academia," p. 35n.1.

<sup>561</sup> See, for example, Marijke de Valck and Malte Hagener, "Introduction: Down with Cinephilia? Long Live Cinephilia? And Other Videosyncratic Pleasures," *Cinephilia: Movies, Love and Memory*, ed. Marijke de Valck and Malte Hagener (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2005), p. 12; see also Thomas Elsaesser, "Cinephilia or the Uses of Disenchantment," *Cinephilia: Movies, Love and Memory*, ed. Marijke de Valck and Malte Hagener (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2005), p. 41.

<sup>562</sup> Elena Gorfinkel, "Cult Film or Cinephilia by Any Other Name," *Cineaste* 34.1 (Winter 2008), pp. 33, 38.

<sup>563</sup> Jonathan Buchsbaum and Elena Gorfinkel, eds., "Cinephilia Dossier: What is Being Fought For by Today's Cinephilia(s)?" *Framework* 50.1-2 (Spring/Fall 2009), pp. 176-228. In this dossier, the clearest expressions of a new cinephilia are found in the essays by Zachary Campbell, Lucas Hilderbrand, Girish Shambu, and Laurent Jullier, though other essayists speak of it and to it. See also Mark Betz, ed., "In Focus: Cinephilia," *Cinema Journal* 49.2 (Winter 2010), pp. 130-178, and Jonathan Rosenbaum and Adrian Martin, ed., *Movie Mutations: The Changing Face of World Cinephilia* (London: BFI, 2003).

<sup>564</sup> De Valck and Hagener, "Introduction," p. 22.

<sup>565</sup> Elsaesser, "Cinephilia," p. 41.

<sup>566</sup> Who—or what—might be the common enemy of this new cinephilia? One answer this dossier gives is global capital, with its stress on copyright and property. According to Zachary Campbell, "today's cinephilia" fights "for its autonomy, its right and capacity to use technologies—such as email, the Internet, digital piracy—unhindered by commercial or corporate statutes that exists not for culture and daily life and pleasure, but for the milked profits of regulated leisure." Zachary Campbell, "On the Political Challenges of the Cinephile Today," *Framework* 50.1-2 (Spring/Fall 2009), p. 212.

<sup>567</sup> Susan Sontag, "The Decay of Cinema," *New York Times*, February 25, 1996, late final edition: section 6, p. 60. This piece is cited by many contributors to De Valck and Hagener's collection as well as by many writers in Mark Betz's recent In Focus section of *Cinema Journal* devoted to cinephilia. Sontag seems to have crystallized the thoughts of many, fomenting a lively debate that has continued most actively since her death in 2004. Another central resource of the recent cinephilia debates is the work of Antoine de Baecque, especially *La cinéphilie: Invention d'un regard, histoire d'une culture, 1944-1968* (Paris: Fayard, 2003).

<sup>568</sup>

Jonathan Rosenbaum, "Reply to Cinephilia Survey," *Framework* 50.1-2 (Spring/Winter 2009), p. 182. For a different expression of the same view, see Jonathan Rosenbaum, *Essential Cinema: On the Necessity of Film Canons*, "Introduction" (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2004), pp. xii-xiii. To be fair, Rosenbaum has recently expressed a happier view of the new cinephilias. See Jonathan Rosenbaum, *Goodbye Cinema, Hello Cinephilia* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2010), pp. xii-xiii, 3-7.

<sup>569</sup>

Lucas Hilderbrand, "Cinematic Promiscuity: Cinephilia after Videophilia," *Framework* 50.1-2 (Spring/Winter 2009), p. 217.

<sup>570</sup>

Rosenbaum, "Reply to Cinephilia Survey," p. 182.

<sup>571</sup>

Stig Björkman, "Making the Waves," int. Lars von Trier, *Sight & Sound* 19.8 (August 2009), p. 19.

<sup>572</sup> In this, I may inadvertently be embodying aspects of a passage from Christian Metz's *The Imaginary Signifier* that I recently saw quoted in George Toles's essay for Betz's cinephilia portfolio. See George Toles, "Rescuing Fragments: A New Task for Cinephilia," *Cinema Journal* 49.2 (Winter 2010), p. 159. In

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this passage, Metz discusses how he learned to distance himself from his cinephile self while still recalling that self clearly; in this way, he integrated cinephilia into film theory without damaging that theory. Thus, Metz doesn't lose sight of the old cinephile but rather keeps "an eye on him." See Christian Metz, *The Imaginary Signifier: Psychoanalysis and Cinema*, trans. Celia Britton, Annwyl Williams, Ben Brewster, and Alfred Guzzetti (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1977), p. 15. But if there seems a coldness to Metz's double approach, my experience tells me there needn't be in actual life. For me, the coldness of theoretical reflection has allowed me to re-open myself to a variety of cineams, thus expanding the scope of "hot" cinephile consumption through "chilly" anti-cinephile analysis.

## Filmography

This list offers standard details (titles, alternative titles, dates-of-release, and director names) on movies mentioned in the text above, including those that are not "art movies." Generally, I have placed original titles first, except where those titles seem unlikely to be familiar to English speakers.

8 ½ (1963), dir. Federico Fellini  
8 ½ *Women* (1999), dir. Peter Greenaway  
9 *Songs* (2004), dir. Michael Winterbottom  
*The Abandoned* (2006), dir. Nacho Cerdà  
*À bout de souffle* / *Breathless* (1960), dir. Jean-Luc Godard  
*The Act of Seeing with One's Own Eyes* (1971), dir. Stan Brakhage  
*Adaptation* (2002), dir. Spike Jonze  
"Aftermath" (1994), dir. Nacho Cerdà  
*Aguirre, der Zorn Gottes* / *Aguirre, the Wrath of God* (1972), dir. Werner Herzog

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*Ai no corrida / In the Realm of the Senses* (1976), Nagisa Oshima  
*À l'intérieur / Inside* (2007), dir. Alexandre Bustillo, Julien Maury  
*All the Love You Cannes!* (2002), dir. Lloyd Kaufman, Gabriel Friedman, Sean McGrath  
*Les Amants / The Lovers* (1958), dir. Louis Malle  
*À ma soeur / Fat Girl* (2001), dir. Catherine Breillat  
*Amateur* (1994), dir. Hal Hartley  
*Anatomie de l'enfer / Anatomy of Hell* (2004), dir. Catherine Breillat  
*Anémic cinema* (1926), dir. Marcel Duchamp  
*Angels and Insects* (1995), Philip Hass  
*L'année dernière à Marienbad / Last Year at Marienbad* (1961), dir. Alain Resnais  
*À nos amours* (1983), dir. Maurice Pialat  
*Anthony's Desire* (1993), dir. Tom Boka  
*Antichrist* (2009), dir. Lars von Trier  
*L'argent* (1983), dir. Robert Bresson  
*Arraya* (1959), dir. Margot Benacerraf  
*Art School Confidential* (2006), dir. Terry Zwigoff  
*L'assassinat du duc de Guise / The Assassination of the Duke de Guise* (1908), dir. André Calmettes, Charles Le Bargy  
*Au hasard Balthazar* (1966), dir. Robert Bresson  
*The Auteur* (2008), dir. James Westby  
*Avatar* (2009), dir. James Cameron  
*L'avventura / The Adventure* (1960), dir. Michelangelo Antonioni  
*Badlands* (1973), dir. Terrence Malick  
*Bad Lieutenant: Port of Call—New Orleans* (2009), dir. Werner Herzog  
*Baise-moi / Rape Me* (2000), dir. Virginie Despentes and Coralie Trinh Thi  
*The Ballad of Cable Hogue* (1970), dir. Samuel Peckinpah  
*Ballet mécanique* (1924), dir. Fernand Léger, Dudley Murphy  
*Basket Case* (1982), dir. Frank Henenlotter  
*Basquiat* (1996), dir. Julian Schnabel  
*Batalla en el cielo / Battle in Heaven* (2005), dir. Carlos Reygadas  
*Battleship Potemkin / Bronenosets Potyomkin* (1925), dir. Sergei Eisenstein  
*Behind the Green Door* (1972), dir. the Mitchell brothers  
*Being John Malkovich* (1999), dir. Spike Jonze  
*Belle de jour* (1967), Luis Buñuel  
*La belle noiseuse* (1991), dir. Jacques Rivette  
*Betty Blue / 37°2 le matin* (1986), dir. Jean-Jacques Beineix  
*The Bicycle Thief / Ladri di biciclette* (1948), dir. Vittorio de Sica  
*The Big Combo* (1955), Joseph Lewis  
*The Big Lebowski* (1998), dir. the Coen brothers  
*Bijou* (1972), Wakefield Pool  
*The Birth of a Nation* (1915), dir. D.W. Griffith  
*Black Sabbath / I tre volti della paura* (1963), dir. Mario Bava  
*Blood and Black Lace / Sei donne per l'assassino* (1964), dir. Mario Bava  
*Blood Feast* (1963), dir. Herschell Gordon Lewis  
*Blow Job* (1963), dir. Andy Warhol  
*Blow-Up* (1966), dir. Michelangelo Antonioni  
*Bonnie and Clyde* (1967), dir. Arthur Penn  
*Book of Life* (1998), dir. Hal Hartley  
*"Brakhage on Brakhage I"* (1996), dir. Colin Still

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Yang

*A Brighter Summer Day / Gu ling jie shao nian sha ren shie jian* (1991), dir. Edward

*Bright Star* (2009), dir. Jane Campion

*Bring Me the Head of Alfredo Garcia* (1974), dir. Sam Peckinpah

*Broken Embraces / Los abrazos rotos* (2009), dir. Pedro Almodóvar

*Broken Flowers* (2005), dir. Jim Jarmusch

*The Brown Bunny* (2004), dir. Vincent Gallo

*Buffalo '66* (1998), dir. Vincent Gallo

*Des cabinet des Dr. Caligari / The Cabinet of Dr. Caligari* (1919), dir. Robert Wiene

*Caché* (2005), dir. Michael Haneke

*Camille 2000* (1969), dir. Radley Metzger

*Caravaggio* (1986), dir. Derek Jarman

*Carlos* (2010), dir. Olivier Assayas

*Carmen, Baby* (1967), dir. Radley Metzger

*Chantal* (2007), dir. Tony Marsiglia; Seduction Cinema

*Che* (2008), dir. Steven Soderbergh

*La chiave / The Key* (1983), dir. Tinto Brass

*Un chien andalou* (1929), dir. Luis Buñuel

*Children of Men* (2006), dir. Alfonso Cuarón

*La ciénaga / The Swamp* (2001), dir. Lucretia Martel

*Citizen Kane* (1941), dir. Orson Welles

*City of Sadness / Bei qing cheng shi* (1989), Hou Hsiao-hsien

*Cléo de 5 à 7 / Cleo from 5 to 7* (1962), dir. Agnès Varda

*A Clockwork Orange* (1971), dir. Stanley Kubrick

*The Connection* (1962), dir. Shirley Clarke

*The Cook, The Thief, His Wife, and Her Lover* (1989), Peter Greenaway

*The Cow / Gaav* (1969), dir. Daryoush Mehrjui

*Crash* (1996), dir. David Cronenberg

*Cremaster cycle* (1994-2002), dir. Matthew Barney

*Cries and Whispers / Viskningar och rop* (1972), dir. Ingmar Bergman

*The Curious Case of Benjamin Button* (2008), dir. David Fincher

*La dame aux camélias / Camille* (1911), dir. André Calmettes, Henri Pouctal

*Dans ma peau / In My Skin* (2002), dir. Marina de Van

*The Dark Knight* (2008), dir. Christopher Nolan

*Dead Ringers* (1988), dir. David Cronenberg

*Deep Throat* (1970), dir. Gerard Damiano

*Demain on déménage / Tomorrow We Move* (2004), dir. Chantal Akerman

*Detour* (1947), dir. Edgar G. Ulmer

*The Devil in Miss Jones* (1973), Gerard Damiano

*The Devils* (1971), dir. Ken Russell

*Devils on the Doorstep / Guizi lai le* (2000), dir. Jiang Wen

*Les diaboliques* (1954), dir. Henri-Georges Clouzot

*La dolce vita* (1960), dir. Federico Fellini

*Dogtooth / Kynodontas* (2009), dir. Giorgos Lanthimos

*Donnie Darko* (2001), dir. Richard Kelly

*Do You Like Hitchcock?* (2005), dir. Dario Argento

*The Dreamers* (2003), dir. Bernardo Bertolucci

*Dr. Jekyll and Mistress Hyde* (2003), dir. Tony Marisglia

*L'eclisse / Eclipse* (1962), dir. Michaelangelo Antonioni

*Ecstasy / Ekstase* (1933), dir. Gustav Machatý

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*Edward Scissorhands* (1990), dir. Tim Burton  
*Emmanuelle* (1974), dir. Just Jaeckin  
*Empire* (1964), dir. Andy Warhol  
*Eraserhead* (1976), dir. David Lynch  
*D'Est / From the East* (1993), dir. Chantal Akerman  
*Et Dieu... créa la femme / ...And God Created Woman* (1956), dir. Roger Vadim  
*The Eternal Sunshine of the Spotless Mind* (2004), dir. Michel Gondry  
*The Evil Dead* (1981), dir. Sam Raimi  
*Evil Dead 2* (1987), dir. Sam Raimi  
*Exit Through the Gift Shop* (2010), dir. Banksy  
*Eyes Wide Shut* (1999), dir. Stanley Kubrick  
*Fahrenheit 9/11* (2004), dir. Michael Moore  
*Fallen Angels / Duo luo tian shi* (1995), dir. Wong Kar-wai  
*Faster, Pussycat! Kill! Kill!* (1965), dir. Russ Meyer  
*Fight Club* (1999), dir. David Fincher  
*Five Easy Pieces* (1970), dir. Bob Rafelson  
*Flandres / Flanders* (2006), dir. Bruno Dumont  
*Floating Weeds / Ukigusa* (1959), dir. Yasujirô Ozu  
*The Following* (1996), dir. Christopher Nolan  
*For the Love of Movies: The Story of American Film Criticism* (2009), dir. Gerald Peary  
*Freaks* (1932), dir. Tod Browning  
*Frontière(s) / Frontier(s)* (2007), dir. Xavier Gens  
*Funny Ha Ha* (2002), dir. Andrew Bujalski  
*Le gai savoir / Joy of Learning* (1968), dir. Jean-Luc Godard  
*The Game of Love / Le blé en herbe* (1954), dir. Claude Atant-Lara  
*The Getaway* (1972), dir. Samuel Peckinpah  
*The Girlfriend Experience* (2009), dir. Steven Soderbergh  
*The Girl from Monday* (2005), dir. Hal Hartley  
*The Girl Who Knew Too Much / La ragazza che sapeva troppo* (1963), dir. Mario Bava  
*The Glamorous Life of Sachiko Hanai / Hatsujô kateikyôshi: sensei no aijiru* (2004), dir.

Mitsuru

Meike

*Glen or Glenda* (1959), dir. Ed Wood  
*The Goalie's Anxiety at the Penalty Kick / Die Angst des Tormanns beim Elfmeter*  
 (1972), dir.

Wim Wenders

*The Godfather* (1972), dir. Francis Ford Coppola  
*Gran Torino* (2008), dir. Clint Eastwood  
*Greed* (1924), dir. Erich von Stroheim  
*Gummo* (1997), dir. Harmony Korinne  
*Gun Crazy* (1949), dir. Joseph Lewis  
*"Hapax Legomena II: Poetic Justice"* (1972), dir. Hollis Frampton  
*Happiness* (1998), dir. Todd Solondz  
*Hardcore* (1984-1993), dir. Richard Kern  
*Hard Edge* (2003), dir. Andrew Blake  
*Haute Tension / High Tension* (2003), Alexandre Aja  
*The Headless Woman / La mujer sin cabeza* (2008), dir. Lucretia Martel  
*Heat* (1995), dir. Michael Mann  
*Heaven's Gate* (1980), dir. Michael Cimino  
*Henry and June* (1990), dir. Philip Kaufman

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*Henry Fool* (1997), dir. Hal Hartley  
*High Art* (1996), dir. Lisa Cholodenko  
*Hiroshima mon amour* (1959), dir. Alain Resnais  
*Histoire d'O / The Story of O* (1975), dir. Just Jaeckin  
*The Host / Gwoemul* (2006), dir. Bong Joon-ho  
*Hostel* (2005), dir. Eli Roth  
*House / Hausu* (1977), dir. Nobuhiko Obayashi  
*House of Love* (2000), dir. Tom Lazarus  
*I am Curious (Yellow) / Jag är nyfiken – en film i gult* (1969), dir. Vilgot Sjöman  
*I, a Woman / Jag – en kvinna* (1965), dir. Mac Ahlberg  
*Idioterne / The Idiots* (1998), dir. Lars von Trier  
*I Heart Huckabees* (2004), dir. David O. Russell  
*In a Better World / Hævnen* (2010), dir. Susanne Bier  
*Inception* (2010), dir. Christopher Nolan  
*Inga* (1968), dir. Joseph Sarno  
*Inglourious Basterds* (2009), dir. Quentin Tarantino  
*Inland Empire* (2006), dir. David Lynch  
*In the Company of Men* (1997), dir. Neil Labute  
*In The Cut* (2003), dir. Jane Campion  
*In the Mood for Love / Fa yeung nin wa* (2000), dir. Wong Kar-wai  
*Intimacy* (2001), dir. Patrice Chéreau  
*Intolerance* (1916), dir. D.W. Griffith  
*L'intrus / The Intruder* (2004), dir. Claire Denis  
*Invictus* (2009), dir. Clint Eastwood  
*Irma Vep* (1996), dir. Olivier Assayas  
*Irreversible / Irreversible* (2002), dir. Gaspar Noé  
*The Isle / Seom* (2000), dir. Kim Ki-duk  
*Jeanne Dielman, 23 Quai du Commerce, 1080 Bruxelles* (1975), dir. Chantal Akerman  
*La jetée / The Pier* (1962), dir. Chris Marker  
*Jeux interdits / Forbidden Games* (1952), dir. René Clément  
*Jules et Jim / Jules and Jim* (1962), dir. François Truffaut  
*Junior Bonner* (1972), dir. Samuel Peckinpah  
*Ken Park* (2002), dir. Larry Clark  
*Kids* (1995), dir. Larry Clark  
*Last House on the Left* (1972), dir. Wes Craven  
*The Last Seduction* (1994), dir. John Dahl  
*Latex* (1995), dir. Michael Ninn  
*Let the Right One In / Låt den rätte komma in* (2008), dir. Tomas Alfredson  
*The Legend of Sleepy Hollow* (1999), dir. Tim Burton  
*Lies / Gojital* (1999), dir. Jang Sun-woo  
*Lie With Me* (2005), dir. Clément Virgo  
*Lolita* (1962), dir. Stanley Kubrick  
*Lord of the G-Strings* (2003), dir. Terry West  
*Lord of the Rings* trilogy (2001-2003), dir. Peter Jackson  
*Lost Highway* (1996), dir. David Lynch  
*Lucía y el sexo / Sex and Lucia* (2001), dir. Julio Medem  
*Lust for Dracula* (2004), dir. Tony Marsiglia; Seduction Cinema  
*La maman et la putain / The Mother and the Whore* (1973), dir. Jean Eustache  
*Manhatta* (1921), dir. Paul Strand, Charles Sheeler  
*Man with a Movie Camera / Chelovek s kino-apparatom* (1929), dir. Dziga Vertov

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*Marat/Sade* (1967), dir. Peter Brook  
*Martyrs* (2008), dir. Pascal Laugier  
*The Masque of the Red Death* (1964), dir. Roger Corman  
*Memento* (2000), dir. Christopher Nolan  
*Memories of Murder / Salinui chueok* (2003), dir. Bong Joon-ho  
*Memories of Underdevelopment / Memorias del subdesarrollo* (1968), dir. Tomás Gutiérrez Alea  
*Le mépris / Contempt* (1963), dir. Jean-Luc Godard  
*Meshes of the Afternoon* (1943), dir. Maya Deren  
*The Miracle / Il miracolo* (1948), dir. Roberto Rossellini  
*The Mirror / Zerkalo* (1975), dir. Andrei Tarkovsky  
*Mom and Dad* (1945), dir.  
*Mona: The Virgin Nymph* (1970), dir. Howard Ziehm  
*Morte a venezia / Death in Venice* (1971), dir. Luchino Visconti  
*Mouchette* (1967), dir. Robert Bresson  
*Mudhoney* (1965), dir. Russ Meyer  
*Los muertos* (2004), dir. Lisandro Alonso  
*Mulholland Drive* (2001), dir. David Lynch  
*Mysterious Object at Noon / Dokfa nai meuman* (2000), dir. Apichatpong Weerasethakul  
*Mystic River* (2003), dir. Clint Eastwood  
*Naked* (1993), dir. Mike Leigh  
*The Naked Kiss* (1964), dir. Samuel Fuller  
*The Naked Venus* (1959), dir. Edgar G. Ulmer  
*New Wave Hookers* (1985), dir. Greg Dark  
*The New World* (2005), dir. Terrence Malick  
*Night of the Living Dead* (1968), dir. George Romero  
*La notte / The Night* (1961), dir. Michelangelo Antonioni  
*Oasis* (2002), dir. Lee Chang-dong  
*Oldboy* (2003), dir. Park Chan-wook  
*Olympia* (1938), dir. Leni Riefenstahl  
*One Summer of Happiness / Hon dandsade en sommar* (1951), dir. Arne Mattsson  
*The Opening of Misty Beethoven* (1975), dir. Radley Metzger ("Henry Paris")  
*Out of the Past* (1947), dir. Jacques Tourneur  
*Paris Chic* (1997), dir. Andrew Blake  
*Paris, Texas* (1984), dir. Wim Wenders  
*The Passenger / Professione: reporter* (1975), dir. Michelangelo Antonioni  
*Pather Panchali* (1955), Satyajit Ray  
*Persona* (1966), dir. Ingmar Bergman  
*Phantom of the Paradise* (1974), dir. Brian De Palma  
*La pianiste / The Piano Teacher* (2001), dir. Michael Haneke  
*The Piano* (1993), dir. Jane Campion  
*Picnic at Hanging Rock* (1975), dir. Peter Weir  
*The Pillow Book* (1996), dir. Peter Greenaway  
*Pink Flamingos* (1972), dir. John Waters  
*Plan 9 From Outer Space* (1953), dir. Ed Wood  
*Planet of the Apes* (1968), dir. Franklin J. Schaffner  
*Planet Terror* (2007), dir. Robert Rodriguez  
*Plastic City / Dangkou* (2008), dir. Nelson Yu Lik-wai  
*Platform / Zhangtai* (2000), dir. Jia Zhangke  
*The Player* (1992), dir. Robert Altman

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*Play-mate of the Apes* (2002), dir. John Bacchus  
*Pola X* (1999), dir. Leos Carax  
*The Night Porter / Il portiere di notte* (1974), dir. Liliana Cavani  
*The Prestige* (2006), dir. Christopher Nolan  
*Private Vices, Public Pleasures / Vizi privati, pubbliche virtù* (1976), dir. Miklós Jancsó  
*Prospero's Books* (1991), dir. Peter Greenaway  
*Public Enemies* (2009), dir. Michael Mann  
*Pulp Fiction* (1994), dir. Quentin Tarantino  
*Quai des orfèvres* (1947), dir. Henri-Georges Clouzot  
*Les quatre cents coups / The 400 Blows* (1959), dir. François Truffaut  
*Raise the Red Lantern / Da hong deng long gao gao gua* (1991), dir. Zhang Yimou  
*Ran* (1985), dir. Akira Kurosawa  
*Rape* (1969), dir. Yoko Ono, John Lennon  
*Rashômon* (1950), dir. Akira Kurosawa  
*Ratatouille* (2007), dir. Brad Bird, Jan Pinkava  
*Red Psalm / Még kér a nép* (1972), dir. Miklós Jancsó  
*Reefer Madness* (1936), dir. Louis Gasnier  
*Reservoir Dogs* (1992), dir. Quentin Tarantino  
*Resurrection of Eve* (1973), dir. the Mitchell brothers  
*Le retour à la raison / Return to Reason* (1923), dir. Man Ray  
*Riddles of the Sphinx* (1977), dir. Peter Wollen, Laura Mulvey  
*robZtv: Robert Zverina Epic Video Memoir* (2010), dir. Robert Zverina  
*The Rocky Horror Picture Show* (1975), dir.  
*Romance* (1999), dir. Catherine Breillat  
*Roma, città aperta / Open City* (1945), dir. Roberto Rossellini  
*Roommates* (1981), dir. Chuck Vincent  
*Russian Ark / Russkiy kovcheg* (2002), dir. Aleksandr Sokurov  
*Salò o le 120 giornate di Sodoma / Salò or the 120 Days of Sodom* (1975), dir. Pier Paolo Pasolini  
*Le sang d'un poète / Blood of a Poet* (1932), dir. Jean Cocteau  
*Sátántangó / Satan's Tango* (1994), dir. Béla Tarr  
*The Searchers* (1956), dir. John Ford  
*Sébastien* (1976), dir. Derek Jarman  
*Secrets Behind the Wall / Kabe no naka no himegoto* (1965), dir. Koji Wakamatsu  
*Serbis / Service* (2008), dir. Brillante Mendoza  
*A Serious Man* (2009), dir. Ethan Coen, Joel Coen  
*Seul contre tous / I Stand Alone* (1998), dir. Gaspar Noé  
*sex, lies, and videotape* (1989), dir. Steven Soderbergh  
*Shock Corridor* (1963), dir. Samuel Fuller  
*Shortbus* (2006), dir. John Cameron Mitchell  
*The Silence / Tystnaden* (1963), dir. Ingmar Bergman  
*Lorna's Silence / La silence de Lorna* (2009), dir. Jean-Pierre Dardenne, Luc Dardenne  
*Sin City* (2005), dir. Robert Rodriguez  
*Sinful* (2006), dir. Tony Marsiglia  
*Sleep* (1963), dir. Andy Warhol  
*Solaris* (2002), dir. Steven Soderbergh  
*Sommaren med Monika / Summer with Monika* (1953), dir. Ingmar Bergman  
*Sonic Outlaws* (1995), dir. Craig Baldwin  
*Story of Qiu Ju / Qiu Ju da guan si* (1992), dir. Zhang Yimou  
*Stranger than Paradise* (1984), dir. Jim Jarmusch

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*Straw Dogs* (1971), dir. Samuel Peckinpah  
*Stroszek* (1977), dir. Werner Herzog  
*The Sun / Solntse* (2005), dir. Aleksandr Sokurov  
*Suspiria* (1977), dir. Dario Argento  
*Suzie Heartless* (2009), dir. Tony Marsiglia  
*Sympathy for Mr. Vengeance / Boksuneun naui geot* (2002), Park Chan-wook  
*Symphonie diagonale* (1924), dir. Viking Eggeling  
*Syndromes and a Century / Sang sattawat* (2006), dir. Apichatpong Weerasethakul  
*Synecdoche, New York* (2008), dir. Charlie Kaufman  
*Taste of Cherry / T'am e guilass* (1997), dir. Abbas Kiarostami  
*A Taste of Honey* (1961), dir. Tony Richardson  
*Tenebre / Unsane* (1982), dir. Dario Argento  
*The Texas Chainsaw Massacre* (1974), dir. Tobe Hooper  
*Therese and Isabelle* (1968), dir. Radley Metzger  
*They Live* (1988), dir. John Carpenter  
*Thirst* (2009), dir. Park Chan-wook  
*This Sporting Life* (1963), dir. Lindsay Anderson  
*Three Kings* (1999), dir. David O. Russell  
*Tie Me Up! Tie Me Down! / ¡Átame!* (1990), dir. Pedro Almodóvar  
*Titanic* (1997), dir. James Cameron  
*Tokyo Story / Tōkyō monogatari* (1953), dir. Yasujiro Ozu  
*Touch of Evil* (1958), dir. Orson Welles  
*El Topo* (1970), dir.  
*The Toxic Avenger* (1984), dir. Lloyd Kaufman  
*Traffic* (2000), dir. Steven Soderbergh  
*Tribulation 99* (1991), dir. Craig Baldwin  
*Triumph of the Will / Triumph des willens* (1935), dir. Leni Riefenstahl  
*Tromeo and Juliet* (1996), dir. Lloyd Kaufman  
*Trouble Every Day* (2001), dir. Claire Denis  
*Twentynine Palms* (2002), dir. Bruno Dumont  
*Under the Skin of the Night / Zir-e poost-e shab* (1974), dir. Fereydon Gole  
*Unforgiven* (1992), dir. Clint Eastwood  
*Until the Light Takes Us* (2009), dir. Aaron Aites and Audrey Ewell  
*(Untitled)* (2009), dir. Jonathan Parker  
*Vampyros Lesbos* (1971), Jess Franco  
*Videodrome* (1983), dir. David Cameron  
*Viva* (2007), dir. Anna Biller  
 "A Visit from the Incubus" (2001), dir. Anna Biller  
*Voyeur Confessions* (2002), dir. Tom Lazarus  
*Walkabout* (1971), dir. Nicolas Roeg  
*Wavelength* (1967), dir. Michael Snow  
*The Wayward Cloud / Tian bian yi duo yun* (2005), dir. Tsai Ming-liang  
*Le week-end / Week End* (1967), Jean-Luc Godard  
*Werckmeister Harmonies / Werckmeister harmóniák* (2000), dir. Béla Tarr, Ágnes  
 Hranitzky  
*White Material* (2009), dir. Claire Denis  
*The White Ribbon / Das weisse Band—Eine deutsche Kindergeschichte* (2009), dir.  
 Michael Haneke  
*Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf* (1966), dir. Mike Nichols  
*The Wild Bunch* (1969), dir. Samuel Peckinpah

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*Woman In the Dunes / Suna no onna* (1964), dir. Hiroshi Teshigahara  
*Word of Mouth* (1999), dir. Tom Lazarus  
*The World / Shijie* (2004), dir. Jia Zhangke  
*Yeelen* (1987), dir. Souleymane Cissé  
*Zabriskie Point* (1969), dir. Michelangelo Antonioni  
*Zodiac* (2007), dir. David Fincher  
*Zombie Strippers* (2008), dir. Jay Lee  
*Zoo* (2007), dir. Robinson Devor  
*Zorn's Lemma* (1970), dir. Hollis Frampton

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## <sup>1</sup>NOTES